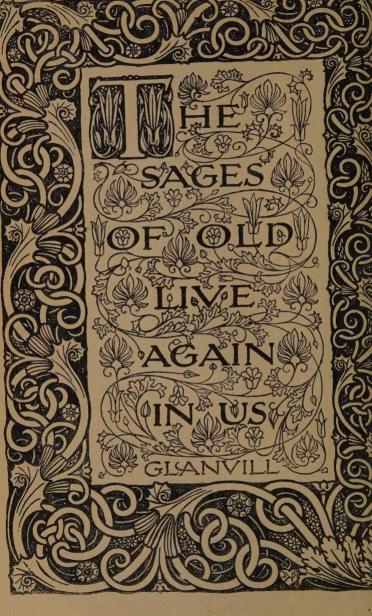
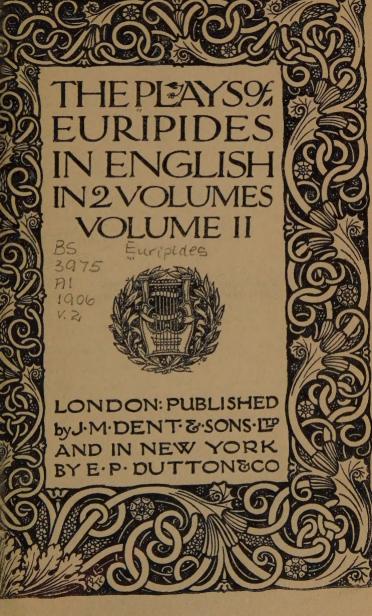


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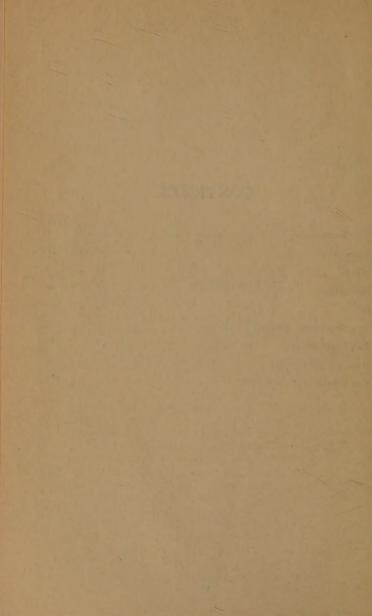




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EURIPIDES

THE BACCHANALS

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

Dionysus. Chorus of Bacchanals. Tiresias. Cadmus. Pentheus. ATTENDANT MESSENGER. SECOND MESSENGER AGAVE.

Dionysus. Unto this land of Thebes I come, Jove's son, Dionysus; he whom Semele of yore,

Mid the dread midwifery of lightning fire,
Bore, Cadmus' daughter. In a mortal form,
The God put off, by Dirce's stream I stand,
And cool Ismenos' waters; and survey
My mother's grave, the thunder-slain, the ruins
Still smouldering of that old ancestral palace,
The flame still living of the lightning fire,
Herè's immortal vengeance 'gainst my mother.

And well hath reverent Cadmus set his ban On that heaven-stricken, unapproached place, His daughter's tomb, which I have mantled o'er With the pale verdure of the trailing vine.

And I have left the golden Lydian shores, The Phrygian and the Persian sun-seared plains, And Bactria's walls; the Medes' wild wintry land Have passed, and Araby the Blest; and all Of Asia, that along the salt-sea coast Lifts up her high-towered cities, where the Greeks, With the Barbarians mingled, dwell in peace.

And everywhere my sacred choirs, mine Orgies Have founded, by mankind confessed a God. Now first in an Hellenic town I stand.

Of all the Hellenic land here first in Thebes, I have raised my revel shout, my fawn-skin donned, Ta'en in my hand my thyrsus, ivy-crowned.

But here, where least beseemed, my mother's sisters

Vowed Dionysus was no son of Jove:

That Semele, by mortal paramour won, Belied great Jove as author of her sin; 'Twas but old Cadmus' craft: hence Jove in wrath

Struck dead the bold usurper of his bed.

So from their homes I've goaded them in frenzy;
Their wits all crazed, they wander o'er the mountains,
And I have forced them wear my wild attire.
There's not a woman of old Cadmus' race,
But I have maddened from her quiet house;
Unseemly mingled with the sons of Thebes,
On the roofless rocks, 'neath the pale pines, they
sit.

Needs must this proud recusant city learn, In our dread Mysteries initiate, Her guilt, and humbly seek to make atonement To me, for Semele, mine outraged mother— To me, the God confessed, of Jove begot.

Old Cadmus now his might and kingly rule To Pentheus hath given up, his sister's son, My godhead's foe; who from the rich libation Repels me, nor makes mention of my name In holy prayer. Wherefore to him, to Thebes, And all her sons, soon will I terribly show That I am born a God: and so depart (Here all things well disposed) to other lands, Making dread revelation of myself.

But if this Theban city, in her ire,
With arms shall seek to drive from off the mountains
My Bacchanal rout, at my wild Mænads' head
I'll meet, and mingle in the awful war.
Hence have I ta'en the likeness of a man,
Myself transmuted into human form.

But ye, who Tmolus, Lydia's strength, have left My Thyasus of women, whom I have led From lands barbarian, mine associates here, And fellow-pilgrims; lift ye up your drums, Familiar in your native Phrygian cities, Made by your mother Rhea's craft and mine; And beat them all round Pentheus' royal palace, Beat, till the city of Cadmus throngs to see. I to the Bacchanals in the dim glens Of wild Cithæron go to lead the dance,

Chorus. From the Asian shore,
And by the sacred steep of Tmolus hoar,
Light I danced with wing-like feet,
Toilless toil and labour sweet!
Away! away! whoe'er he be;
Leave our path, our temple free!
Seal up each silent lip in holy awe.
But I, obedient to thy law,

O Dionysus! chant the choral hymn to thee

Blest above all of human line, Who, deep in mystic rites divine, Leads his hallowed life with us, Initiate in our Thyasus; And, purified with holiest waters,

Goes dancing o'er the hills with Bacchus' daughters.
And thy dark orgies hallows he,
O mighty mother, Cybele!
He his thyrsus shaking round,
All his locks with ivy crowned,

O Dionysus! boasts of thy dread train to be.

Bacchanals! away, away!

Lead your God in fleet array;
Bacchus lead, the ever young,
A God himself from Gods that sprung,
From the Phrygian mountains down
Through every wide-squared Grecian town.
Him the Theban queen of yore
'Mid Jove's fast-flashing lightnings bore:
In her awful travail wild
Sprung from her womb the untimely child,
While smitten with the thunderblast
The sad mother breathed her last.

Instant him Saturnian Jove Received with all a mother's love; In his secret thigh immured, There with golden clasps secured, Safe from Herè's jealous sight; Then, as the Fates fulfilled, to light He gave the hornéd god, and wound The living snakes his brows around; Whence still the wandéd Mænads bear Their serpent prey wreathed in their floating hair.

Put on thy ivy crown,
O Thebes, thou sacred town!
O hallowed house of dark-haired Semele!
Bloom, blossom everywhere,
With flowers and fruitage fair,
And let your frenzied steps supported be
With thyrsi from the oak
Or the green ash-tree broke:
Your spotted fawn-skins line with locks
Torn from the snowy fleecéd flocks:
Shaking his wanton wand let each advance,
And all the land shall madden with the dance.

Bromius, that his revel rout To the mountains leads about: To the mountains leads along, Where awaits the female throng; From the distaff, from the loom, Raging with the God they come. O ye mountains, wild and high, Where the old Kouretæ lie: Glens of Crete, where Jove was nurst, In your sunless caverns first The crested Korybantes found The leathern drums mysterious round, That, mingling in harmonious strife With the sweet-breathed Phrygian fife, In Mother Rhea's hands they place, Meet the Bacchic song to grace. And the frantic Satyrs round That ancient Goddess leap and bound: And soon the Trieteric dances light Began, immortal Bacchus' chief delight.

> On the mountains wild 'tis sweet When faint with rapid dance our feet; Our limbs on earth all careless thrown With the sacred fawn-skins strewn,

To quaff the goat's delicious blood, A strange, a rich, a savage food. Then off again the revel goes O'er Phrygian, Lydian mountain brows; Evoë! Evoë! leads the road, Bacchus self the maddening God!

And flows with milk the plain, and flows with wine, Flows with the wild bees' nectar-dews divine; And soars, like smoke, the Syrian incense pale—

The while the frantic Bacchanal
The beaconing pine-torch on her wand
Whirls around with rapid hand,
And drives the wandering dance about,
Beating time with joyous shout,
And casts upon the breezy air
All her rich luxuriant hair;
Ever the burthen of her song,
"Raging, maddening, haste along
Bacchus' daughters, ye the pride
Of golden Tmolus' fabled side;
While your heavy cymbals ring,
Still your 'Evoë! Evoë!' sing!"
Evoë! the Evian god rejoices

In Phrygian tones and Phrygian voices, When the soft holy pipe is breathing sweet, In notes harmonious to her feet,

Who to the mountain, to the mountain speeds; Like some young colt that by its mother feeds,

Gladsome with many a frisking bound,

The Bacchanal goes forth and treads the echoing ground.

ground.

Tiresias. Ho! some one in the gates, call from his place
Cadmus, Agenor's son, who, Sidon's walls
Leaving, built up this towered city of Thebes.
Ho! some one say, "Tiresias awaits him."
Well knows he why I am here; the covenant
Which I, th' old man, have made with him still older,
To lift the thyrsus wand, the fawn-skin wear,
And crown our grey hairs with the ivy leaves.

Cadmus. Best friend! with what delight within my palace
I heard thy speech, the speech of a wise man!
Lo! I am here, in the God's sacred garb;

For needs must we, the son of mine own daughter, Dionysus, now 'mongst men a manifest God, Even to the utmost of our power extol. Where shall we lead the dance, plant the light foot, And shake the hoary locks? Tiresias, thou The aged lead the aged: wise art thou, Nor will I weary night and day the earth Beating with my lithe thyrsus. Oh, how sweetly Will we forget we are old!

Tiresias.

Thou'rt as myself:

I too grow young; I too essay the dance.

Cadmus. Shall we, then, in our chariots seek the mountains?

Tiresias. It were not the same homage to the God. Cadmus. The old man still shall be the old man's tutor.

Tiresias. The God will guide us thither without toil. Cadmus. Of all the land, join we alone the dance?

Tiresias. All else misjudge; we only are the wise.

Cadmus. Too long we linger; hold thou fast mine hand. Tiresias. Lo! thus true yoke-fellows join hand with hand.

Cadmus. I, mortal-born, may not despise the Gods. Tiresias. No wile, no paltering with the deities.

The ancestral faith, coeval with our race,
No subtle reasoning, if it soar aloft
Even to the height of wisdom, can o'erthrow.
Some one will say that I disgrace mine age,
Rapt in the dance, and ivy-crowned my head.
The Gods admit no difference: old or young,
All it behoves to mingle in the rite.

From all he will receive the common honour, Nor deign to count his countless votaries.

Cadmus. Since thou, Tiresias, seest not day's sweet light,
I, as thy Seer, must tell thee what is coming.
Lo, Pentheus, hurrying homewards to his palace,
Echion's son, to whom I have given the kingdom.
He is strangely moved! What new thing will he say?

Pentheus. I have been absent from this land, and hear

Of strange and evil doings in the city.
Our women all have left their homes, to join
These fabled mysteries. On the shadowy rocks
Frequent they sit, this God of yesterday,
Dionysus, whosoe'er he be, with revels
Dishonourable honouring. In the midst

Stand the crowned goblets; and each stealing forth,

This way and that, creeps to a lawless bed;
In pretext, holy sacrificing Mænads,
But serving Aphrodite more than Bacchus.
All whom I've apprehended, in their gyves
Our officers guard in the public prison.
Those that have 'scaped I'll hunt from off the mountains.

Ino, Agave who to Echion bare me,
Her too, Autonoe, Antæus' mother;
And fettering them all in iron bonds,
I'll put an end to their mad wickedness.
'Tis said a stranger hath appeared among us,
A wizard, sorcerer, from the land of Lydia,
Beauteous with golden locks and purple cheeks,
Eyes moist with Aphrodite's melting fire.
And day and night he is with the throng, to guile
Young maidens to the soft inebriate rites.

But if I catch him 'neath this roof, I'll silence The beating of his thyrsus, stay his locks' Wild tossing, from his body severing his neck. He, say they, is the new God, Dionysus, That was sewn up within the thigh of Jove. He, with his mother, guiltily that boasted Herself Jove's bride, was blasted by the lightning. Are not such deeds deserving the base halter? Sin heaped on sin! whoe'er this stranger be.

But lo, new wonders! see I not Tiresias,
The prophet, in the dappled fawn-skin clad?
My mother's father too (a sight for laughter!)
Tossing his hair? My sire, I blush for thee
Beholding thine old age thus fatuous grown.
Wilt not shake off that ivy? free thine hand
From that unseemly wand, my mother's father!
This is thy work, Tiresias. This new God
Wilt thou instal 'mongst men, at higher price
To vend new auspices, and well paid offerings.
If thine old age were not thy safeguard, thou
Shouldst pine in chains among the Bacchanal
women.

False teacher of new rites! For where 'mong women

The grape's sweet poison mingles with the feast, Nought holy may we augur of such worship.

Chorus. Oh impious! dost thou not revere the Gods, Nor Cadmus, who the earth-born harvest sowed? Echion's son! how dost thou shame thy lineage!

Tiresias. 'Tis easy to be eloquent, for him

That's skilled in speech, and hath a stirring theme. Thou hast the flowing tongue as of a wise man, But there's no wisdom in thy fluent words; For the bold demagogue, powerful in speech, Is but a dangerous citizen lacking sense. This the new deity thou laugh'st to scorn, I may not say how mighty he will be Throughout all Hellas.

Youth! there are two things

Man's primal need, Demeter, the boon Goddess (Or rather will ye call her Mother Earth?), With solid food maintains the race of man. He, on the other hand, the son of Semele, Found out the grape's rich juice, and taught us mortals That which beguiles the miserable of mankind Of sorrow, when they quaff the vine's rich stream. Sleep too, and drowsy oblivion of care He gives, all-healing medicine of our woes. He 'mong the gods is worshipped a great god, Author confessed to man of such rich blessings Him dost thou love to scorn, as in Jove's thigh Sewn up. This truth profound will I unfold: When Jove had snatched him from the lightning fire. He to Olympus bore the new-born babe. Stern Herè strove to thrust him out of heaven, But Jove encountered her with wiles divine: He clove off part of th' earth-encircling air. There Dionysus placed the pleasing hostage, Aloof from jealous Herè. So men said Hereafter he was cradled in Jove's thigh (From the assonance of words in our old tongue For thigh and hostage the wild fable grew). A prophet is our god, for Bacchanalism And madness are alike prophetical. And when the god comes down in all his power. He makes the mad to rave of things to come.

Of Ares he hath attributes: he the host In all its firm array and serried arms, With panic fear scatters, ere lance cross lance:

From Dionysus springs this frenzy too.

And him shall we behold on Delphi's crags Leaping, with his pine torches lighting up The rifts of the twin-headed rock; and shouting And shaking all around his Bacchic wand Great through all Hellas. Pentheus, be advised! Vaunt not thy power o'er man, even if thou thinkest That thou art wise (it is diseased, thy thought), Think it not! In the land receive the god. Pour wine, and join the dance, and crown thy brows. Dionysus does not force our modest matrons To the soft Cyprian rites; the chaste by nature Are not so cheated of their chastity. Think well of this, for in the Bacchic choir The holy woman will not be less holy. Thou'rt proud, when men to greet thee throng the gates, And the glad city welcomes Pentheus' name; He too, I ween, delights in being honoured.

I, therefore, and old Cadmus whom thou mock'st, Will crown our heads with ivy, dance along An hoary pair—for dance perforce we must; I war not with the gods. Follow my counsel; Thou'rt at the height of madness, there's no medicine

Can minister to disease so deep as thine.

Chorus. Old man! thou sham'st not Pheebus thine own god.
Wise art thou worshipping that great god Bromius.

Cadmus. My son! Tiresias well hath counselled thee;
Dwell safe with us within the pale of law.
Now thou fliest high: thy sense is void of sense.
Even if, as thou declar'st, he were no god,
Call thou him god. It were a splendid falsehood
If Semele be thought t' have borne a god;
'Twere honour unto us and to our race.
Hast thou not seen Actæon's wretched fate?
The dogs he bred, who fed from his own board,
Rent him in wrath to pieces; for he vaunted
Than Artemis to be a mightier hunter.
So do not thou: come, let me crown thine head
With ivy, and with us adore the god.

Pentheus. Hold off thine hand! Away! Go rave and dance, And wipe not off thy folly upon me. On him, thy folly's teacher, I will wreak Instant relentless justice. Some one go, The seats from which he spies the flight of birds— False augur—with the iron forks o'erthrow, Scattering in wild confusion all abroad, And cast his chaplets to the winds and storms; Thou'lt gall him thus, gall to the height of bitterness. Ye to the city! seek that stranger out, That womanly man, who with this new disease Afflicts our matrons, and defiles their beds: Seize him and bring him hither straight in chains, That he may suffer stoning, that dread death. Such be his woful orgies here in Thebes.

Tiresias. Oh, miserable! That know'st not what thou sayest, Crazed wert thou, now thou'rt at the height of madness: But go we, Cadmus, and pour forth our prayer, Even for this savage and ungodly man, And for our city, lest the god o'ertake us

With some strange vengeance.

Come with thy ivy staff,

Lean thou on me, and I will lean on thee: 'Twere sad for two old men to fall, yet go We must, and serve great Bacchus, son of Tove. What woe, O Cadmus, will this woe-named man Bring to thine house! I speak not now as prophet, But a plain simple fact: fools still speak folly.

Chorus.

Holy goddess! Goddess old! Holy! thou the crown of gold In the nether realm that wearest. Pentheus' awful speech thou hearest, Hearest his insulting tone 'Gainst Semele's immortal son, Bromius, of gods the first and best. At every gay and flower-crowned feast, His the dance's jocund strife, And the laughter with the fife, Every care and grief to lull, When the sparkling wine-cup full Crowns the gods' banquets, or lets fall

Sweet sleep on the eyes of men at mortal festival.

Of tongue unbridled without awe,
Of madness spurning holy law,
Sorrow is the Jove-doomed close;
But the life of calm repose
And modest reverence holds her state
Unbroken by disturbing fate;
And knits whole houses in the tie
Of sweet domestic harmony.
Beyond the range of mortal eyes
'Tis not wisdom to be wise.
Life is brief, the present clasp,
Nor after some bright future grasp.
Such were the wisdom, as I ween,
Only of frantic and ill-counselled men.

Oh, would to Cyprus I might roam,
Soft Aphrodite's isle,
Where the young loves have their perennial
home,

That soothe men's hearts with tender guile:
Or to that wondrous shore where ever
The hundred-mouthed barbaric river
Makes teem with wealth the showerless land!
O lead me! lead me, till I stand,
Bromius!—sweet Bromius!—where high swelling
Soars the Pierian muses' dwelling—
Olympus' summit hoar and high—
Thou revel-loving deity!

For there are all the graces,
And sweet desire is there,
And to those hallowed places
To lawful rites the Bacchanals repair.
The deity, the son of Jove,

The banquet is his joy,
Peace, the wealth-giver, doth he love,
That nurse of many a noble boy.
Not the rich man's sole possessing;
To the poor the painless blessing
Gives he of the wine-cup bright.
Him he hates, who day and night,
Gentle night, and gladsome day,
Cares not thus to while away.

Be thou wisely unsevere! Shun the stern and the austere! Follow the multitude; Their usage still pursue! Their homely wisdom rude

(Such is my sentence) is both right and true. Officer. Pentheus, we are here! In vain we went not forth:

The prey which thou commandest we have taken. Gentle our quarry met us, nor turned back His foot in flight, but held out both his hands; Became not pale, changed not his ruddy colour. Smiling he bade us bind, and lead him off, Stood still, and made our work a work of ease. Reverent I said, "Stranger, I arrest thee not Of mine own will, but by the king's command." But all the Bacchanals, whom thou hast seized And bound in chains within the public prison, All now have disappeared, released they are leaping In their wild orgies, hymning the god Bacchus. Spontaneous fell the chains from off their feet; The bolts drew back untouched by mortal hand. In truth this man, with many wonders rife

Comes to our Thebes. 'Tis thine t' ordain the rest. Pentheus. Bind fast his hands! Thus in his manacles Sharp must he be indeed to 'scape us now.

There's beauty, stranger-woman-witching beauty (Therefore thou art in Thebes)—in thy soft form; Thy fine bright hair, not coarse like the hard athlete's. Is mantling o'er thy cheek warm with desire; And carefully thou hast cherished thy white skin; Not in the sun's swart beams, but in cool shade, Wooing soft Aphrodite with thy loveliness.

But tell me first, from whence hath sprung thy race? Dionysus. There needs no boast; 'tis easy to tell this:

All flowery Tmolus hast thou haply heard?

Pentheus. Yea; that which girds around the Sardian city.

Dionysus. Thence am I come, my country Lydia.

Pentheus. Whence unto Hellas bringest thou thine orgies?

Dionysus. Dionysus, son of Jove, hath hallowed them. Pentheus. Is there a Jove then, that begets new gods?

Dionysus. No, it was here he wedded Semele.

Pentheus. Hallowed he them by night, or in the eye of day?

Dionysus. In open vision he revealed his orgies.

Pentheus. And what, then, is thine orgies' solemn form;

Dionysus. That is not uttered to the uninitiate.

Pentheus. What profit, then, is theirs who worship him?

Dionysus. Thou mayst not know, though precious were that knowledge.

Pentheus. A cunning tale, to make me long to hear thee. Dionysus The orgies of our god scorn impious worshippers.

Pentheus. Thou saw'st the manifest god! What was his

form ?

Dionysus. Whate'er he would: it was not mine to choose. Pentheus. Cleverly blinked our question with no answer. Dionysus. Who wiseliest speaks, to the fool speaks foolish

Who wiseliest speaks, to the fool speaks foolishness.

tess.

Pentheus. And hither com'st thou first with thy new god! Dionysus. There's no Barbarian but adores these rites.

Pentheus. Being much less wise than we Hellenians.

Dionysus. In this more wise. Their customs differ much. Pentheus. Perfermest thou these rites by night or day?

Dionysus. Mostpart by night—night hath more solemn awe.

Pentheus. A crafty rotten plot to catch our women.

Dionysus. Even n the day bad men can do bad deeds.

Pentheus. Thou of thy wiles shalt pay the penalty.

Dionysus. Thou of thine ignorance—impious towards the gods!

Pentheus. He's boll, this Bacchus—ready enough in words. Dionysus. What penalty? what evil wilt thou do me?

Dionysus. What penalty? what evil wilt thou do me? Pentheus. First will I clip away those soft bright locks.

Dionysus. My locks are holy, dedicate to my god.

Pentheus. Next, give thou me that thyrsus in thine hand.

Dionysus. Take it thyself; 'tis Dionysus' wand. Pentheus. I'll bind the body in strong iron chains.

Dionysus. My god hinself will loose them when he will. Pentheus. When thou nvok'st him 'mid thy Bacchanals. Dionysus. Even now he is present; he beholds me now.

Pentheus. Where is he hen? Mine eyes perceive him not.

Dionysus. Near me: the impious eyes may not discern him. Pentheus. Seize on him, for he doth insult our Thebes.

Pentheus. Seize on him, for he doth insult our Thebes. Dionysus. I warn thee, lind me not; the insane, the sane.

Pentheus. I, stronger that thou art, say I will bind thee.

Dionysus. Thou know'st not where thou art, or what thou

art.

Pentheus. Pentheus, Agave's son, my sire Echion.

Dionysus. Thou hast a name whose very sound is woe.

Pentheus. Away, go bind him in our royal stable,

That he may sit in midnight gloom profound There lead thy dance! But those thou hast hither led.

Thy guilt's accomplices, we'll sell for slaves; Or, silencing their noise and beating drums. As handmaids to the distaff set them down.

Dionysus. Away then! 'Tis not well I bear such wrong;
The vengeance for this outrage he will wreak
Whose being thou deniest, Dionysus:
Outraging me, ye bind him in your chains.

Chorus. Holy virgin-haunted water

Ancient Achelous' daughter!
Dirce! in thy crystal wave
Thou the child of Jove didst lave
Thou, when Zeus, his awful sire,
Snatched him from the immorta fire;
And locked him up within his taigh,
With a loud but gentle cry—
"Come, my Dithyrambus, cone,
Enter thou the masculine wonb!"

Lo! to Thebes I thus progaim, "Twice born!" thus thy mysic name. Blessed Dirce! dost thou will From thy green marge to repel Me, and all my jocund round, With their ivy garlands crowned.

Why dost fly me?
Why deny me?
By all the joys of wine I wear,
Bromius still shall be mycare.

Oh, what pride! pride unforgiven
Manifests, against high leaven
Th' earth-born, whom it mortal birth
'Gat Echion, son of earh;
Pentheus of the dragor brood,
Not of human flesh and blood;
But potent dire, like him whose pride,
The Titan, all the god defied.

Me, great Bromius' handmaid true; Me, with all my festive crew, Thralled in chains he still would keep In his palace dungeon deep.

Seest thou this, O son of Jove, Dionysus, from above? Thy wrapt prophets dost thou see At strife with dark necessity?

The golden wand

In thy right hand. Cone, come thou down Olympus' side, Andquell the bloody tyrant in his pride.

> Art thou holding revel now On Nysa's wild beast-haunted brow? Ist thy Thyasus that clambers Oer Corycia's mountain chambers? Oron Olympus, thick with wood, Wih his harp where Orpheus stood, And led the forest trees along, Ledthe wild beasts with his song.

> OPieria, blessed land, Eviu hallows thee, advancing, With is wild choir's mystic dancing,

Ove rapid Axius' strand He shil pass; o'er Lydia's tide Then Is whirling Mænads guide. Lydia, arent boon of health, Giver toman of boundless wealth; Washingmany a sunny mead, Where the prancing coursers feed. What ho what ho! ye Bacchanals Rouse an wake! your master calls.

Who is hee? and what is he Chorus. That cas upon our wandering train?

What ho! what ho! I call again!

The somf Jove and Semele. What ho! hat ho! our lord and master: Come, with potsteps fast and faster,

Toin our rev! Bromius, speed, Till quakes te earth beneath our tread.

Alas! as!

Dionysus.

Dionysus.

Chorus.

Soon shall Pentheus' palace wall Shake and crumble to its fall.

Dionysus. Bacchus treads the palace floor!
Adore him!

Chorus.

Oh! we do adore! Behold! behold!

The pillars with their weight above, Of ponderous marble, shake and move. Hark! the trembling roof within

Bacchus shouts his mighty din.

Dionysus. The kindling lamp of the dark lightning bring!
Fire, fire the palace of the guilty king.

Chorus. Behold! behold! it flames! Do ye not see,
Around the sacred tomb of Semele,
The blaze, that left the lightning thee,
When Jove's red thunder fired the air?

On the earth, supine and low,

Your shuddering limbs, ye Mænas, throw! The king, the Jove-born god, destroing all, In widest ruin strews the palace wal.

Dionysus. O, ye Barbarian women, Thus prostate in dismay;
Upon the earth ye've fallen! See yenot, as ye may,
How Bacchus Pentheus' palace In wath hath shaken
down?

Rise up! rise up! take courage-Shake off that trembling swoon.

Chorus. O light that goodliest shinest Ovr our mystic rite, In state forlorn we saw thee—Sw with what deep affright!

Dionysus. How to despair ye yielded AI boldly entered in To Pentheus, as if captured, Int the fatal gin.

Chorus. How could I less? Who guard us If thou shouldst come to woe?

But how wast thou delivered Fom thy ungodly foe?

Dionysus. Myself, myself delivered, Vith ease and effort slight.

Chorus. Thy hands, had he not bond them, In halters strong and tight?

Dionysus. 'Twas even then I mockedhim: He thought me in his chain;

He touched me not, nor packed me; His idle thoughts were vain!

In the stable stood a heifer, Where he thought he had me bound:

Round the beast's knees his cords And cloven hoofs he wound.

Wrath-breathing, from his body The sweat fell like a flood:

He bit his lips in fury, While I beside who stood

Looked on in unmoved quiet.

As at that instant come,

Shook Bacchus the strong palace, And on his mother's tomb

Flames kindled. When he saw it, On fire the palace deeming,

Hither he rushed and thither, For "water, water," screaming;

And every slave 'gan labour, But laboured all in vain. The toil he soon abandoned. As though I had fled amain

He rushed into the palace: In his hand the dark sword gleamed.

Then, as it seemed, great Bromius—I say, but as it seemed—

In the hall a bright light kindled. On that he rushed, and there,

As slaying me in vengeance, Stood stabbing the thin air.

But then the avenging Bacchus Wrought new calamities:

From roof to base that palace In smouldering ruin lies. Bitter ruing our imprisonment, With toil forspent he threw

On earth his useless weapon. Mortal, he had dared to do

'Gainst a god unholy battle. But I, in quiet state, Unheeding Pentheus' anger, Came through the palace gate.

It seems even now his sandal Is sounding on its way: Soon is he here before us, And what now will he say?

With ease will I confront him, Ire-breathing though he stand.

'Tis easy to a wise man To practise self-command.

Pentheus. I am outraged — mocked! The stranger hath escaped me

Whom I so late had bound in iron chains.

Off, off! He is here!—the man? How's this?

Before our palace, as just issuing forth?

Dionysus. Stay thou thy step! Subdue thy wrath to peace! Pentheus. How, having burst thy chains, hast thou come forth?

Dionysus. Said I not—heardst thou not? "There's one will free me!"

Pentheus. What one? Thou speakest still words new and strange.

Dionysus. He who for man plants the rich-tendrilled vine.

Pentheus. Well layest thou this reproach on Dionysus.
Without there, close and bar the towers around!

Dionysus. What! and the gods! O'erleap they not all walls? Pentheus. Wise in all wisdom save in that thou shouldst have!

Dionysus. In that I should have wisest still am I.

But listen first, and hear the words of him Who comes to thee with tidings from the mountains

Here will we stay. Fear not, we will not fly!

Messenger. Pentheus, that rulest o'er this land of Thebes!

I come from high Cithæron, ever white

With the bright glittering snow's perennial rays.

Pentheus. Why com'st thou? On what pressing mission bound?

Messenger. I've seen the frenzied Bacchanals, who had fled On their white feet, forth goaded from the land.

I come to tell to thee and to this city

The awful deeds they do, surpassing wonder.

But answer first if I shall freely say

All that's done there, or furl my prudent speech;

For thy quick temper I do fear, O king, Thy sharp resentment and o'er-royal pride.

Pentheus. Speak freely. Thou shall part unharmed by me; Wrath were not seemly 'gainst the unoffending.

But the more awful what thou sayst of these
Mad women, I the more on him who hath guiled them
To their wild life, will wreak my just revenge.

Messenger. Mine herds of heifers I was driving, slow Winding their way along the mountain crags,

When the sun pours his full beams on the earth. I saw three bands, three choirs of women: one Autonoe led, thy mother led the second, Agave—and the third Ino: and all Ouietly slept, their languid limbs stretched out: Some resting on the ash-trees' stem their tresses: Some with their heads upon the oak-leaves thrown Careless, but not immodest; as thou sayest, That drunken with the goblet and shrill fife In the dusk woods they prowl for lawless love. Thy mother, as she heard the hornéd steers Deep lowing, stood up 'mid the Bacchanals And shouted loud to wake them from their rest. They from their lids shaking the freshening sleep, Rose upright, wonderous in their decent guise, The young, the old, the maiden yet unwed. And first they loosed their locks over their shoulders, Their fawn-skins fastened, wheresoe'er the clasps Had lost their hold, and all the dappled furs With serpents bound, that lolled out their lithe tongues. Some in their arms held kid, or wild-wolf's cub, Suckling it with her white milk; all the young mothers Who had left their new-born babes, and stood with breasts

Full swelling: and they all put on their crowns
Of ivy, oak, or flowering eglantine.
One took a thyrsus wand, and struck the rock,
Leaped forth at once a dewy mist of water;
And one her rod plunged deep in the earth, and there
The god sent up a fountain of bright wine.
And all that longed for the white blameless draught
Light scraping with their finger-ends the soil
Had streams of exquisite milk; the ivy wands
Distilled from all their tops rich store of honey.
Hadst thou been there, seeing these things, the god

And we, herdsmen and shepherds, gathered around. And there was strife among us in our words Of these strange things they did, these marvellous things.

Thou now revil'st thou hadst adored with prayer.

One city-bred, a glib and practised speaker, Addressed us thus: "Ye that inhabit here The holy mountain slopes, shall we not chase Agave, Pentheus' mother, from the Bacchanals, And win the royal favour?" Well to us He seemed to speak; so, crouched in the thick bushes, We lay in ambush. They at the appointed hour Shook their wild thyrsi in the Bacchic dance, "Iacchus" with one voice, the son of Jove, "Bromius" invoking. The hills danced with them; And the wild beasts; was nothing stood unmoved.

And I leaped forth, as though to seize on her, Leaving the sedge where I had hidden myself. But she shrieked out, "Ho, my swift-footed dogs! These men would hunt us down, but follow me-Follow me, all your hands with thyrsi armed." We fled amain, or by the Bacchanals We had been torn in pieces. They, with hands Unarmed with iron, rushed on the browsing steers. One ye might see a young and vigorous heifer Hold, lowing in her grasp, like prize of war. And some were tearing asunder the young calves: And ye might see the ribs or cloven hoofs Hurled wildly up and down, and mangled skins Were hanging from the ash boughs, dropping blood. The wanton bulls, proud of their tossing horns Of yore, fell stumbling, staggering to the ground, Dragged down by the strong hands of thousand maidens.

And swifter were the entrails torn away Than drop the lids over your royal eyeballs.

Like birds that skim the earth, they glide along O'er the wide plains, that by Asopus' streams Shoot up for Thebes the rich and yellow corn; And Hysiæ and Erythræ, that beneath Cithæron's crag dwell lowly, like fierce foes Invading, all with ravage waste and wide Confounded; infants snatched from their sweet homes:

And what they threw across their shoulders, clung Unfastened, nor fell down to the black ground. No brass, nor ponderous iron: on their locks Was fire that burned them not. Of those they spoiled Some in their sudden fury rushed to arms.

Then was a mightier wonder seen, O king:
From them the pointed lances drew no blood
But they their thyrsi hurling, javelin-like,
Drave all before, and smote their shameful backs:

Women drave men, but not without the god.

So did they straight return from whence they came, Even to the fountains, which the god made flow; Washed off the blood, and from their cheeks the drops The serpents licked, and made them bright and clean. This godhead then, whoe'er he be, my master! Receive within our city. Great in all things, In this I hear men say he is the greatest—He hath given the sorrow-soothing vine to man For where wine is not love will never be, Nor any other joy of human life.

Chorus. I am afraid to speak the words of freedom Before the tyrant, yet it must be said:

"Inferior to no god is Dionysus."

Pentheus. 'Tis here then, like a wild fire, burning on,
This Bacchic insolence, Hellas' deep disgrace.
Off with delay! Go to the Electrian gates
And summon all that bear the shield, and all
The cavalry upon their prancing steeds,
And those that couch the lance, and of the bow
Twang the sharp string. Against these Bacchanals
We will go war. It were indeed too much
From women to endure what we endure.

Dionysus. Thou wilt not be persuaded by my words
Pentheus! Yet though of thee I have suffered

wrong

I warn thee, rise not up against the god. Rest thou in peace. Bromius will never brook Ye drive his Mænads from their mountain haunts.

Pentheus. Wilt teach me? Better fly and save thyself,
Ere yet I wreak stern justice upon thee.

Dionysus. Rather do sacrifice, than in thy wrath

Kick 'gainst the pricks—a mortal 'gainst a god.

Pentheus. I'll sacrifice, and in Cithæron's glens,
As they deserve, a hecatomb of women.

Dionysus. Soon will ye fly. 'Twere shame that shields of brass

Before the Bacchic thyrsi turn in rout.

Pentheus. I am bewildered by this dubious stranger; Doing or suffering, he holds not his peace.

Dionysus. My friend! Thou still mayest bring this to good end.

Pentheus. How so? By being the slave of mine own slaves? Dionysus. These women-without force of arms, I'll bring

them. Pentheus. Alas! he is plotting now some wile against me!

Dionysus. But what if I could save thee by mine arts? Pentheus. Ye are all in league, that ye may hold your orgies.

Dionysus. I am in a league 'tis true, but with the god!

Pentheus. Bring out mine armour! Thou, have done thy speech!

Dionysus. Ha! wouldst thou see them seated on the mountains?

Pentheus. Ay! for the sight give thousand weight of gold. Dionysus. Why hast thou fallen upon this strange desire? Pentheus. 'Twere grief to see them in their drunkenness. Dionysus. Yet gladly wouldst thou see, what see would

grieve thee.

Pentheus. Mark well! in silence seated 'neath the ash-trees. Dionysus. But if thou goest in secret they will scent thee

Pentheus. Best openly, in this thou hast said well.

Dionysus. But if we lead thee, wilt thou dare the way? Pentheus. Lead on, and swiftly! Let no time be lost! Dionysus. But first enwrap thee in these linen robes

Pentheus. What, will he of a man make me a woman!

Dionysus. Lest they should kill thee, seeing thee as a man. Pentheus. Well dost thou speak; so spake the wise of old.

Dionysus. Dionysus hath instructed me in this.

Pentheus. How then can we best do what thou advisest? Dionysus. I'll enter in the house, and there array thee.

Pentheus. What dress? A woman's? I am ashamed to wear it.

Dionysus. Art thou not eager to behold the Mænads?

Pentheus. And what dress sayst thou I must wrap around me?

Dionysus. I'll smooth thine hair down lightly on thy brow. Pentheus. What is the second portion of my dress?

Dionysus. Robes to thy feet, a bonnet on thine head. Pentheus. Wilt thou array me then in more than this? Dionysus. A thyrsus in thy hand, a dappled fawn-skin.

Pentheus. I cannot clothe me in a woman's dress.

Dionysus. Thou wilt have bloodshed, warring on the Mænads.

Pentheus. 'Tis right, I must go first survey the field. Dionysus. 'Twere wiser than to hunt evil with evil.

Pentheus. How pass the city, unseen of the Thebans?

Dionysus. We'll go by lone byways; I'll lead thee safe.

Pentheus. Aught better than be mocked by these loose
Bacchanals.

When we come back, we'll counsel what were best. Dionysus. Even as you will: I am here at your command.

Pentheus. So let us on; I must go forth in arms,

Or follow the advice thou givest me.

Dionysus. Women! this man is in our net; he goes
To find his just doom 'mid the Bacchanals.
Dionysus, to thy work! thou'rt not far off;
Vengeance is ours. Bereave him first of sense:
Yet be his frenzy slight. In his right mind
He never had put on a woman's dress;
But now, thus shaken in his mind, he'll wear it.
A laughing-stock I'll make him to all Thebes,
Led in a woman's dress through the wide city.
For those fierce threats in which he was so great.
But I must go, and Pentheus—in the garb
Which wearing, even by his own mother's hand
Slain, he goes down to Hades. Know he must
Dionysus, son of Jove, among the gods
Mightiest, yet mildest to the sons of men.

Chorus. O when, through the long night,
With fleet foot glancing white,
Shall I go dancing in my revelry,
My neck cast back, and bare

Unto the dewy air

Unto the dewy air,

Like sportive fawn in the green meadow's glee?

Lo, in her fear she springs Over th' encircling rings,

Over the well-woven nets far off and fast;

While swift along her track
The huntsman cheers his pack,

With panting toil, and fiery storm-wind haste.
Where down the river-bank spreads the wide meadow,

Rejoices she in the untrod solitude.

Couches at length beneath the silent shadow Of the old hospitable wood. What is wisest? what is fairest, Of god's boons to man the rarest? With the conscious conquering hand Above the foeman's head to stand. What is fairest still is dearest.

Slow come, but come at length,
In their majestic strength
Faithful and true, the avenging deities:
And chastening human folly,
And the mad pride unholy,
Of those who to the gods bow not their knees.
For hidden still and mute,
As glides their printless foot,
The impious on their winding path they hound

For it is ill to know,
And it is ill to do,
Beyond the law's inevo

Beyond the law's inexorable bound.

'Tis but light cost in his own power sublime

To array the godhead, whosoe'er he be;

And law is old even as the oldest time.

And law is old, even as the oldest time, Nature's own unrepealed decree.

What is wisest? what is fairest, Of god's boons to man the rarest? With the conscious conquering hand Above the foeman's head to stand What is fairest still is rarest.

Who hath 'scaped the turbulent sea, And reached the haven, happy he! Happy he whose toils are o'er, In the race of wealth and power! This one here, and that one there, Passes by, and everywhere Still expectant thousands over Thousands hopes are seen to hover, Some to mortals end in bliss;

Some have already fled away: Happiness alone is his
That happy is to-day.

Dionysus. Thou art mad to see that which thou shouldst

And covetous of that thou shouldst not covet. Pentheus! I say, come forth! Appear before me, Clothed in the Bacchic Mænads' womanly dress: Spy on thy mother and her holy crew. Come like in form to one of Cadmus' daughters.

Pentheus. Ha! now indeed two suns I seem to see,

A double Thebes, two seven-gated cities; Thou, as a bull, seemest to go before me, And horns have grown upon thine head. Art thou A beast indeed? Thou seem'st a very bull.

Dionysus. The god is with us; unpropitious once, But now at truce: now seest thou what thou shouldst see ?

Pentheus. What see I? Is not that the step of Ino? And is not Agave there, my mother?

Dionysus. Methinks 'tis even they whom thou behold'st; But lo! this tress hath strayed out of its place, Not as I braided it, beneath thy bonnet.

Pentheus. Tossing it this way now, now tossing that, In Bacchic glee, I have shaken it from its place.

Dionysus. But we, whose charge it is to watch o'er thee, Will braid it up again. Lift up thy head.

Pentheus. Braid as thou wilt, we yield ourselves to thee. Dionysus. Thy zone is loosened, and thy robe's ong folds Droop outward, nor conceal thine ankles now.

Pentheus. Around my right foot so it seems, yet sure Around the other it sits close and well.

Dionysus. Wilt thou not hold me for thy best of friends, Thus strangely seeing the coy Bacchanals?

Pentheus. The thyrsus—in my right hand shall I hold it? Or thus am I more like a Bacchanal?

Dionysus. In thy right hand, and with thy right foot raise it. I praise the change of mind now come o'er thee.

Pentheus. Could I not now bear up upon my shoulders Cithæron's crag, with all the Bacchanals?

Dionysus. Thou couldst if 'twere thy will. In thy right mind Erewhile thou wast not; now thou art as thou shouldst be.

Pentheus. Shall I take levers, pluck it up with my hands, Or thrust mine arm or shoulder 'neath its base?

Dionysus. Destroy thou not the dwellings of the nymphs,
The seats where Pan sits piping in his joy.

Pentheus. Well hast thou said; by force we conquer not These women. I'll go hide in yonder ash.

Dionysus. Within a fatal ambush wilt thou hide thee, Stealing, a treacherous spy, upon the Mænads.

Pentheus. And now I seem to see them there like birds
Couching on their soft beds amid the fern.

Dionysus. Art thou not therefore set as watchman o'er them? Thou'lt seize them—if they do not seize thee first.

Pentheus. Lead me triumphant through the land of Thebes!
I, only I, have dared a deed like this.

Dionysus. Thou art the city's champion, thou alone.

Therefore a strife thou wot'st not of awaits thee.

Follow me! thy preserver goes before thee;

Another takes thee hence.

Pentheus. Mean'st thou my mother?

Dionysus. Aloft shalt thou be borne.

Pentheus. O the soft carriage!

Dionysus. In thy mother's hands.

Pentheus. Wilt make me thus luxurious?

Dionysus. Strange luxury, indeed!

Pentheus. 'Tis my desert.

Dionysus. Thou art awful!—awful! Doomed to awful end!

Thy glory shall soar up to the high heavens!

Stretch forth thine hand, Agave!—ye her kin, Daughters of Cadmus! To a terrible grave Lead I this youth! Myself shall win the prize—Bromius and I; the event will show the rest.

Chorus. Ho! fleet dogs and furious, to the mountains, ho! Where their mystic revels Cadmus' daughters keep.

Rouse them, goad them out,

'Gainst him, in woman's mimic garb concealed,
Gazer on the Mænads in their dark rites unrevealed.
First his mother shall behold him on his watch below,
From the tall tree's trunk or from the wild scaur steep;
Fiercely will she shout—

"Who the spy upon the Mænads on the rocks that

roam

To the mountain, to the mountain, Bacchanals, has come?"

Who hath borne him?

He is not of woman's blood—
The lioness!

Or the Lybian Gorgon's brood? Come, vengeance, come, display thee! With thy bright sword array thee!

The bloody sentence wreak
On the dissevered neck

Of him who god, law, justice hath not known, Echion's earth-born son.

He, with thought unrighteous and unholy pride, 'Gainst Bacchus and his mother, their orgies' mystic mirth

Still holds his frantic strife,

And sets him up against the god, deeming it light

To vanquish the invincible of might.

Hold thou fast the pious mind; so, only so, shall glide In peace with gods above, in peace with men on earth, Thy smooth painless life.

I admire not, envy not, who would be otherwise: Mine be still the glory, mine be still the prize,

By night and day

To live of the immortal gods in awe; Who fears them not

Is but the outcast of all law.

Come, vengeance, come display thee! With thy bright sword array thee!

The bloody sentence wreak

On the dissevered neck
Of him who god, law, justice has not known,
Echion's earth-born son.

Appear! appear!
Or as the stately steer!
Or many-headed dragon be!
Or the fire-breathing lion, terrible to see.

Come, Bacchus, come 'gainst the hunter of the Bacchanals,

Even now, now as he falls Upon the Mænads' fatal herd beneath,

With smiling brow,
Around him throw
The inexorable net of death.

Messenger. O house most prosperous once throughout all Hellas!

House of the old Sidonian!—in this land
Who sowed the dragon's serpent's earth-born harvest—

How I deplore thee! I a slave, for still

Grieve for their master's sorrows faithful slaves.

Chorus. What's this? Aught new about the Bacchanals?

Messenger. Pentheus hath perished, old Echion's son.

Chorus. King Bromius, thou art indeed a mighty god!

Messenger. What sayst thou? How is this? Rejoicest thou,

O woman, in my master's awful fate?

Chorus. Light chants the stranger her barbarous strains;
I cower not in fear for the menace of chains.

Messenger. All Thebes thus void of courage deemest thou?

Chorus. O Dionysus! Dionysus! Thebes

Hath o'er me now no power.

Messenger. 'Tis pardonable, yet it is not well,

Woman, in others' miseries to rejoice.

Chorus. Tell me, then, by what fate died the unjust—
The man, the dark contriver of injustice?

Messenger. Therapnæ having left the Theban city,
And passed along Asopus' winding shore,
We 'gan to climb Cithæron's upward steep—
Pentheus and I (I waited on my lord),
And he that led us on our quest, the stranger—
And first we crept along a grassy glade,
With silent footsteps, and with silent tongues
Slow moving, as to see, not being seen.
There was a rock-walled glen, watered by a streamlet,
And shadowed o'er with pines; the Mænads there

Sate, all their hands busy with pleasant toil;
And some the leafy thyrsus, that its ivy
Had dropped away, were garlanding anew;
Like fillies some, unharnessed from the yoke;
Chanted alternate all the Bacchic hymn.

Chanted alternate all the Bacchic hymn. Ill-fated Pentheus, as he scarce could see

That womanly troop, spake thus: "Where we stand, stranger,

We see not well the unseemly Mænad dance: But, mounting on a bank, or a tall tree, Clearly shall I behold their deeds of shame."

A wonder then I saw that stranger do.

He seized an ash-tree's high heaven-reaching stem, And dragged it down, dragged, dragged to the low earth;

And like a bow it bent. As a curved wheel Becomes a circle in the turner's lathe, The stranger thus that mountain tree bent down To the earth, a deed of more than mortal strength. Then seating Pentheus on those ash-tree boughs, Upward he let it rise, steadily, gently Through his hands, careful lest it shake him off: And slowly rose it upright to its height, Bearing my master seated on its ridge. There was he seen, rather than saw the Mænads. More visible he could not be, seated aloft. The stranger from our view had vanished quite. Then from the heavens a voice, as it should seem Dionysus, shouted loud, "Behold! I bring, O maidens, him that you and me, our rites, Our orgies laughed to scorn; now takeyour vengeance." And as he spake, a light of holy fire Stood up, and blazed from earth straight up to heaven. Silent the air, silent the verdant grove Held its still leaves; no sound of living thing. They, as their ears just caught the half-heard voice. Stood up erect, and rolled their wondering eyes. Again he shouted. But when Cadmus' daughters Heard manifest the god's awakening voice. Forth rushed they, fleeter than the winged dove, Their nimble feet quick coursing up and down. Agave first, his mother, then her kin, The Mænads, down the torrents' bed, in the grove, From crag to crag they leaped, mad with the god. And first with heavy stones they hurled at him, Climbing a rock in front; the branches some Of the ash-tree darted; some like javelins Sent their sharp thyrsi through the sounding air, Pentheus their mark: but yet they struck him not; His height still baffled all their eager wrath. There sat the wretch, helpless in his despair. The oaken boughs, by lightning as struck off, Roots torn from the earth, but with no iron wedge, They hurled, but their wild labours all were vain.

Agave spake, "Come all, and stand around, And grasp the tree, ye Mænads; soon we will seize The beast that rides thereon. He will ne'er betray The mysteries of our god." A thousand hands Were on the ash, and tore it from the earth: And he that sat aloft, down, headlong, down Fell to the ground, with thousand piteous shrieks, Pentheus, for well he knew his end was near. His mother first began the sacrifice, And fell on him. His bonnet from his hair He threw, that she might know and so not slay him, The sad Agave. And he said, her cheek Fondling, "I am thy child, thine own, my mother! Pentheus, whom in Echion's house you bare. Have mercy on me, mother! For his sins, Whatever be his sins, kill not thy son." She, foaming at the mouth, her rolling eyeballs Whirling around, in her unreasoning reason, By Bacchus all possessed, knew, heeded not. She caught him in her arms, seized his right hand, And, with her feet set on his shrinking side, Tore out the shoulder—not with her own strength: The god made easy that too cruel deed. And Ino laboured on the other side, Rending the flesh: Autonoe, all the rest, Pressed fiercely on, and there was one wild din-He groaning deep, while he had breath to groan, They shouting triumph; and one bore an arm, One a still-sandalled foot; and both his sides Lay open, rent. Each in her bloody hand Tossed wildly to and fro lost Pentheus' limbs. The trunk lay far aloof, 'neath the rough rocks Part, part amid the forest's thick-strewn leaves Not easy to be found. The wretched head. Which the mad mother, seizing in her hands Had on a thyrsus fixed, she bore aloft All o'er Cithæron, as a mountain lion's, Leading her sisters in their Mænad dance. And she comes vaunting her ill-fated chase Unto these walls, invoking Bacchus still, Her fellow-hunter, partner in her prey, Her triumph—triumph soon to end in tears!

I fled the sight of that dark tragedy. Hastening, ere yet Agave reached the palace. Oh! to be reverent, to adore the gods, This is the noblest, wisest course of man, Taking dread warning from this dire event.

Chorus. Dance and sing In Bacchic ring,

Shout, shout the fate, the fate of gloom, Of Pentheus, from the dragon born; He the woman's garb hath worn,

Following the bull, the harbinger, that led him to his doom.

O ye Theban Bacchanals!

Attune ye now the hymn victorious, The hymn all glorious,

To the tear, and to the groan!

Oh game of glory!

To bathe the hands besprent and gory, In the blood of her own son.

But I behold Agave, Pentheus' mother, Nearing the palace with distorted eyes. Hail we the ovation of the Evian god.

O ve Asian Bacchanals! Agave. Who is she on us who calls? Charus. From the mountains, lo! we bear Agave.

To the palace gate Our new-slain quarry fair.

I see, I see! and on thy joy I wait. Without a net, without a snare, The lion's cub, I took him there

In the wilderness, or where?

Cithæron— Agave.

Of Cithæron what?

Gave him to slaughter.

O blest Agave!

In thy song extol me,

Who struck him first?

Mine, mine, the glorious lot.

Who else?

Of Cadmus—

What of Cadmus' daughter?

With me, with me, did all the race Hound the prey.

Agave. Chorus. Agave.

Chorus.

Agave.

Chorus.

Chorus.

Chorus.

Agave.

Chorus.

Agave.

Chorus.

Agave.

Chorus. O fortunate chase!

Agave. The banquet share with me!
Chorus. Alas! what shall our banquet be?
Agave. How delicate the kid and young!

The thin locks have but newly sprung

Over his forehead fair.

Chorus. 'Tis beauteous as the tame beasts' cherished hair.

Agave. Bacchus, hunter known to fame!

Did he not our Mænads bring On the track of this proud game? A mighty hunter is our king!

Praise me! praise me!

Chorus. Praise I not thee?

Agave. Soon with the Thebans all, the hymn of praise Pentheus my son will to his mother raise:

For she the lion prey hath won, A noble deed and nobly done.

Chorus. Dost thou rejoice?

Agave. Ay, with exulting voice

My great, great deed I elevate,

Glorious as great.

Chorus. Sad woman, to the citizens of Thebes

Now show the conquered prey thou bearest hither.

Agave. Ye that within the high-towered Theban city

Dwell, come and gaze ye all upon our prey,
The mighty beast by Cadmus' daughter ta'en;
Nor with Thessalian sharp-pointed javelins,
Nor nets, but with the white and delicate palms
Of our own hands. Go ye, and make your boast,
Trusting to the spear-maker's useless craft:
We with these hands have ta'en our prey, and rent

The mangled limbs of this grim beast asunder.

Where is mine aged sire? Let him draw near!

And where is my son Pentheus? Let him mount

On the broad stairs that rise before our house;

And on the triglyph nail this lion's head,

That I have brought him from our splendid chase. Cadmus. Follow me, follow, bearing your sad burthen,

My servants—Pentheus' body—to our house; The body that with long and weary search I found at length in lone Cithæron's glens; Thus torn, not lying in one place, but wide

Scattered amid the dark and tangled thicket. Already, as I entered in the city With old Tiresias, from the Bacchanals. I heard the fearful doings of my daughter. And back returning to the mountain, bear My son, thus by the furious Mænads slain. Her who Actæon bore to Aristæus. Autonoë, I saw, and Ino with her Still in the thicket goaded with wild madness. And some one said that on her dancing feet Agave had come hither—true he spoke; I see her now—O most unblessed sight!

Agave. Father, 'tis thy peculiar peerless boast Of womanhood the noblest t' have begot-Me—me the noblest of that noble kin. For I the shuttle and the distaff left For mightier deeds — wild beasts with mine own hands

> To capture. Lo! I bear within mine arms These glorious trophies, to be hung on high Upon thy house: receive them, O my father! Call thy friends to the banquet feast! Blest thou! Most blest, through us who have wrought such splendid deeds.

Cadmus. Measureless grief! Eye may not gaze on it, The slaughter wrought by those most wretched hands. Oh! what a sacrifice before the gods! All Thebes, and us, thou callest to the feast. Justly—too justly, hath King Bromius Destroyed us, fatal kindred to our house.

Agave. Oh! how morose is man in his old age, And sullen in his mien. Oh! were my son More like his mother, mighty in his hunting, When he goes forth among the youth of Thebes Wild beasts to chase! But he is great alone, In warring on the gods. We two, my sire, Must counsel him against his evil wisdom. Where is he? Who will call him here before us That he may see me in my happiness?

Cadmus. Woe! woe! When ye have sense of what ye have

With what deep sorrow, sorrow ye! To th' end,

Oh! could ye be, only as now ye are, Nor happy were ye deemed, nor miserable. Agave. What is not well? For sorrow what the cause? Cadmus. First lift thine eyes up to the air around. Agave. Behold! Why thus commandest me to gaze? Cadmus. Is all the same? Appears there not a change? Agave. 'Tis brighter, more translucent than before. Cadmus. Is there the same elation in thy soul?

Agave. I know not what thou mean'st; but I become Conscious—my changing mind is settling down. Cadmus. Canst thou attend, and plainly answer me? Agave. I have forgotten, father, all I said.

Cadmus. Unto whose bed wert thou in wedlock given?

Agave. Echion's, him they call the Dragon-born. Cadmus. Who was the son to thy husband thou didst bear?

Agave. Pentheus, in commerce 'twixt his sire and me. Cadmus. And whose the head thou holdest in thy hands?

Agave. A lion's; thus my fellow-hunters said.

Cadmus. Look at it straight: to look on't is no toil. Agave. What see I? Ha! what's this within my hands? Cadmus. Look on't again, again: thou wilt know too well.

Agave. I see the direct woe that eye may see.

Cadmus. The semblance of a lion bears it now?

Agave. No: wretch, wretch that I am; 'tis Pentheus' head! Cadmus. Even ere yet recognised thou might'st have mourned him.

Agave. Who murdered him? How came he in my hands? Cadmus. Sad truth! Untimely dost thou ever come! Agave. Speak; for my heart leaps with a boding throb. Cadmus. 'Twas thou didst slay him, thou and thine own sisters. Agave. Where died he? In his palace? In what place? Cadmus. There where the dogs Actæon tore in pieces. Agave. Why to Cithæron went the ill-fated man? Cadmus. To mock the god, to mock the orgies there. Agave. But how and wherefore had we thither gone? Cadmus. In madness !—the whole city maddened with thee. Agave. Dionysus hath destroyed us! Late I learn it. Cadmus. Mocked with dread mockery; no god ye held him. Agave. Father! Where's the dear body of my son? Cadmus. I bear it here, not found without much toil, Agave. Are all the limbs together, sound and whole? And Pentheus, shared he in my desperate fury?

Cadmus. Like thee he was, he worshipped not the god. All, therefore, are enwrapt in one dread doom. You, he, in whom hath perished all our house, And I who, childless of male offspring, see This single fruit—O miserable!—of thy womb Thus shamefully, thus lamentably dead-Thy son, to whom our house looked up, the stay Of all our palace he, my daughter's son, The awe of the whole city. None would dare Insult the old man when thy fearful face He saw, well knowing he would pay the penalty. Unhonoured now, I am driven from out mine home: Cadmus the great, who all the race of Thebes Sowed in the earth, and reaped that harvest fair. O best beloved of men, thou art now no more. Yet still art dearest of my children thou! No more, this grey beard fondling with thine hand, Wilt call me thine own grandsire, thou sweet child, And fold me round and say, "Who doth not honour thee?

Old man, who troubles or afflicts thine heart?
Tell me, that I may 'venge thy wrong, my father!"
Now wretchedst of men am I. Thou pitiable—
More pitiable thy mother—sad thy kin.
O if there be who scorneth the great gods,

Gaze on this death, and know that there are gods. Chorus. Cadmus, I grieve for thee. Thy daughter's son Hath his just doom—just, but most piteous.

Hath his just doom—just, but most piteous.

Agave. Father, thou seest how all is changed with me:

I am no more the Mænad dancing blithe,
I am but the feeble, fond, and desolate mother.
I know, I see—ah, knowledge best unknown!

Sight best unseen!—I see, I know my son,
Mine only son!—alas! no more my son.
O beauteous limbs, that in my womb I bare!
O head, that on my lap wast wont to sleep!
O lips, that from my bosom's swelling fount
Drained the delicious and soft-oozing milk!
O hands, whose first use was to fondle me!
O feet, that were so light to run to me!
O gracious form, that men wondering beheld!
O haughty brow, before which Thebes bowed down!

O majesty! O strength! by mine own hands— By mine own murderous, sacrilegious hands— Torn, rent asunder, scattered, cast abroad! O thou hard god! was there no other way To visit us? Oh! if the son must die, Must it be by the hand of his own mother? If the impious mother must atone her sin, Must it be but by murdering her own son?

Dionysus. Now hear ye all, Thebes' founders, what is woven By the dread shuttle of the unerring Fates.

Thou, Cadmus, father of this earth-born race,
A dragon shalt become; thy wife shalt take
A brutish form, and sink into a serpent,
Harmonia, Ares' daughter, whom thou wedd'st,
Though mortal, as Jove's oracle declares.
Thou in a car by heifers drawn shalt ride,
And with thy wife, at the Barbarians' head:
And many cities with their countless host
Shall they destroy, but when they dare destroy
The shrine of Loxias, back shall they return
In shameful flight; but Ares guards Harmonia
And thee, and bears you to the Isles of the Blest.

This say I, of no mortal father born,
Dionysus, son of Jove. Had ye but known
To have been pious when ye might, Jove's son
Had been your friend; ye had been happy still.

Agave. Dionysus, we implore thee! We have sinned! Dionysus. Too late ye say so; when ye should, ye would not. Agave. That know we now; but thou'rt extreme in

vengeance.

Dionysus. Was 1 not outraged, being a god, by you?

Agave. The gods should not be like to men in wrath.

Dionysus. This Jove, my father, long hath granted me.

Agave. Alas, old man! Our exile is decreed.

Dionysus. Why then delay ye the inevitable?

Cadmus. O child, to what a depth of woe we have fallen!

Most wretched thou, and all thy kin beloved!

I too to the Barbarians must depart,

An aged denizen. For there's a prophecy,
'Gainst Hellas a Barbaric mingled host

Harmonia leads, my wife, daughter of Ares.

A dragon I, with dragon nature fierce,

Shall lead the stranger spearmen 'gainst the altars And tombs of Hellas, nor shall cease my woes—Sad wretch!—not even when I have ferried o'er Dark Acheron, shall I repose in peace.

Agave. Father! to exile go I without thee?

Cadmus. Why dost thou clasp me in thine arms, sad child,

A drone among the bees, a swan worn out?

Agave. Where shall I go, an exile from my country?

Cadmus. I know not, child; thy sire is a feeble aid.

Agave. Farewell, mine home! Farewell, my native Thebes!

My bridal chamber! Banished, I go forth.

Cadmus. To the house of Aristæus go, my child.

Agave. I wait for thee, my father!

I for thee!

And for thy sisters.

Agave. Fearfully, fearfully, this deep disgrace, Hath Dionysus brought upon our race.

Dionysus. Fearful on me the wrong that ye had done; Unhonoured was my name in Thebes alone.

Agave. Father, farewell!

Cadmus. Farewell, my wretched daughter!

Agave. So lead me forth-my sisters now to meet,

Sad fallen exiles.

Let me, let me go
Where cursed Cithæron ne'er may see me more,
Nor I the cursed Cithæron see again.
Where there's no memory of the thyrsus dance.
The Bacchic orgies be the care of others.

(uflished 4 38)

ALCESTIS

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

Apollo.
ORCUS.
ALCESTIS. - Quen.
ADMETUS. - mag,
EUMELUS.

HERCULES.
PHERES.
ATTENDANTS.
CHORUS OF PHERÆANS.

Apollon god of Song

Thy royal house, Admetus, yet again I visit, where a slave among thy slaves Thy table, though a god, I deigned to praise; To this compelled by Jove, who slew my son, The healing sage, launching against his breast The flaming thunder; hence enraged I killed The Cyclops, that prepared his fiery holts. For this a penal task my vengeful sire Assigned me, to a mortal doomed a slave Perforce: I hither came, and fed his herds, Who friendly entertained me, guarding then, And to this day, his hospitable house. Holy the house, and holy is its lord, The son of Pheres; him from death I saved The Fates beguiling; for those ancient powers Assented that Admetus should escape Death then approaching, would some other go, Exchanged for him, to the dark realms beneath. His friends, his father, e'en the aged dame That gave him birth, were asked in vain; not one Was found, his wife except; for him she willed To die, and view no more th' ethereal light. She in the house, supported in their arms, Now sighs out her last breath: for she must die. And this the fate-appointed day: for this, Dear as it is, I leave the friendly mansion, Lest there pollution find me. But I see Orcus advancing near, priest of the dead; He to the house of Pluto will conduct her; Observant of the stated time he comes,

Jean

y mate of

ORCUS, APOLLO.

Orcus. Why art thou here? Why dost thou make this house Thy haunt, Apollo? Thou dost wrong, again. Th' infernal realms defrauding of their honours, Torn from them, or delayed. Sufficed it not T' have snatched Admetus from his doom, the Fates With fraudful arts deluding? Now again, Armed with thy bow, why dost thou guard his wife, Daughter of Pelias, bound by solemn vow, Saving her husband's life, to die for him? Apollo. Fear not; thy right I reverence and just claim. Orcus. What means thy bow, if thou revere the right? Apollo. It ever is my wont to bear these arms. Orcus. Ay, and unjustly to defend this house. Apollo. I mourn th' afflictions of the man I love. Orcus. Wouldst thou defraud me of this second dead? Apollo. The first by violence I took not from thee. Orcus. How on the earth then walks he now alive? Apollo. Ransomed by her, for whom thou now art come. Orcus. And I will lead her to the realms below. Apollo. Take her: I know not if I might persuade thee. Orcus. Him, whom I ought, to seize; for that prepared. Apollo. No: but t' involve in death ripe, lingering age. Orcus. Full well I understand thy speech and zeal. Apollo. May then Alcestis to that age be spared? Orcus. No: honour, be assured, delights e'en me. Apollo. Thou canst but take a single life, no more. Orcus. Greater my glory when the youthful die. Apollo. More sumptuous obsequies await her age. Orcus. This were a law in favour of the rich. Apollo. What secret meaning hath thy wisdom here? Orcus. They with their wealth would purchase to die old. Apollo. Wilt thou not then indulge me with this grace? Orcus. Not I indeed: go to: thou knowest my manners. Apollo. Hostile to mortals, hateful to the gods. Orcus. Thou canst not have all that thou shouldst not have. Apollo. Yet, ruthless as thou art, soon wilt thou cease

This contest; such a man to Pheres' house Comes, to the frozen continent of Thrace Sent by Eurystheus for the savage steeds Yoked to the tyrant's car. He, in this house A welcome guest t' Admetus, will by force Take his wife from thee; and no thanks from me Will be thy due; yet what I now entreat Then thou wilt yield, and I shall hate thee still.

Orcus. Say what thou wilt, nothing the more for that Shalt thou from me obtain: this woman goes, Be sure of that, to Pluto's dark domain.

I go, and with this sword assert my claim, For sacred to th' infernal gods that head, Whose hair is hallowed, by this charmèd blade.

anadro.

CHORUS.

1st Semichor. Before this royal mansion all is still:

What may this melancholy silence mean?

2nd Semichor. And not a friend is nigh, from whom to learn
Whether we ought to wail the queen now dead,
Or lives she yet, yet sees the light of heaven,
For conjugal affection justly deemed

For conjugal affection justly deemed By me, by all, the noblest of her sex.

1st Semichor. Hear you a cry, hear you a clash of hands Within, or lamentations for the dead?

2nd Semichor. Not e'en a servant holds his station here Before the gates. O, 'midst this awful gloom Appear, bright Pæan, and dispel the storm!

1st Semichor. If she were dead, they would not be thus silent;
Nor could the body vanish from the house.

2nd Semichor. Whence is thy confidence? My fears o'ercome me.

1st Semichor. A wife so honoured would Admetus bear Without due pomp in silence to her tomb?

2nd Semichor. Nor vase of fountain water do I see
Before the doors, as custom claims, to bathe
The corse; and none hath on the portal placed
His locks, in solemn mourning for the dead
Usually shorn; nor does the younger train
Of females raise their sorrowing voices high.

ist Semichor. Yet this the fatal day, when she must leave

The light of heaven.

2nd Semichor. Why

o, thou hast touched my heart, hast touched my soul set Semichor. When on the good afflictions fall, to grieve Becomes the man that hath been prized as honest.

Alcestis

Strophe.

In vain, our pious vows are vain: Make we the flying sail our care, The light bark bounding o'er the main, To what new realm shall we repair? To Lycia's hallowed strand? Or where in solitary state, 'Midst thirsty deserts wild and wide That close him round on ev'ry side, Prophetic Ammon holds his awful seat? What charm, what potent hand Shall save her from the realms beneath? He comes, the ruthless tyrant Death: I have no priest, no altar more, Whose aid I may implore.

Antistrophe.

O that the son of Phœbus now Lived to behold th' ethereal light! Then might she leave the seats below, Where Pluto reigns in cheerless night The Sage's potent art, Till thund'ring Jove's avenging power Hurled his red thunders at his breast. Could from the yawning gulf releast To the sweet light of life the dead restore. Who now shall aid impart? To ev'ry god at ev'ry shrine The king hath paid the rites divine: But vain his vows, his pious care; And ours is dark despair.

CHORUS, FEMALE ATTENDANT.

Chorus. But of the female train one from the house Comes bathed in tears: what tidings shall I hear? To weep, if aught of ill befalls thy lords, Becomes thee: I would know if yet she lives, Or sinks beneath the ruthless power of death. Attend. As living I may speak of her, and dead.

Chorus. Living and dead at once, how may that be? Attend. E'en now she sinks in death, and breathes her last.

Chorus. Unhappy king, of what a wife bereft!

Attend. Nor knows our lord his suffering, ere it comes.

Chorus. Is there no hope then yet to save her life?

Attend. Th' inevitable day of fate is come.

Chorus. Have you prepared what the sad case requires?

Attend. Each honour that may grace her obsequies.

Chorus. Illustrious in her death, the best of wives:

The sun in his wide course sees not her equal.

Attend. The best of wives indeed; who will gainsay it?

What could the brightest pattern of her sex

Do more? What greater proof give of the honour

She bears her husband, than a ready will To die for him! This all the city knows.

How in the house she hath demeaned herself Will claim thy admiration. When she knew The destined day was come, in fountain water

She bathed her lily-tinctured limbs, then took From her rich chests of odorous cedar formed

A splendid robe, and her most radiant dress; Thus gorgeously arrayed she stood before

The hallowed flames, and thus addressed her prayer: "O queen, I go to the infernal shades,

Yet, ere I go, with reverence let me breathe
My last request—Protect my orphan children,

Make my son happy with the wife he loves, And wed my daughter to a noble husband: Nor let them, like their mother, to the tomb

Nor let them, like their mother, to the tomb Untimely sink, but in their native land

Be blest through lengthened life to honoured age."
Then to each altar in the royal house

She went, and crowned it, and addressed her vows, Plucking the myrtle bough: nor tear, nor sigh

Came from her, neither did th' approaching ill Change the fresh beauties of her vermeil cheek. Her chamber then she visits, and her bed;

There are tears flowed, and thus she spoke: "O bed,
To which my wedded lord, for whom I die,

Led me a virgin bride, farewell! To thee

No blame do I impute, for me alone Hast thou destroyed. Disdaining to betray Thee, and my lord, I die. To thee shall come

Some other woman, not more chaste, perchance

More happy." As she lay, she kissed the couch, And bathed it with a flood of tears: that passed, She left her chamber, then returned, and oft She left it, oft returned, and on the couch Fondly, each time she entered, cast herself. Her children, as they hung upon her robes Weeping, she raised, and clasped them to her breast Each after each, as now about to die. Each servant through the house burst into tears In pity of their mistress; she to each Stretched her right hand; nor was there one so mean To whom she spoke not, and admitted him To speak to her again. Within the house These are our griefs. Admetus must have died, Have perished; but escaping is immersed In sorrows, which his heart shall ne'er forget.

Chorus. Well may the groan burst from him, thus to lose

A wife with every excellence adorned.

Attend. He weeps indeed, and in his arm supports
His much-loved wife, entreats her not to leave him,
Asking impossibilities. She wastes
And fades with her disease; her languid limbs
Supporting on his hand, yet while some breath
Of life remains she wishes to behold
The radiance of the sun, 'tis her last view,
As never more to see his golden orb.
I go to tell them thou art here: not all
Bear to their lords that firm unshaken faith
T' attend them in their ills; but thou of old

Chorus. Supreme of gods, is there no remedy

To these afflictions, from the storms of fate

No refuge to our lords? Some means of safety

Hast thou assigned? Or must these locks be shorn,

And sorrow robe me in her sable weeds?

Hast to this house approved thyself a friend.

Attend. Too plain, my friends, too plain: yet to the gods
Breathe we our vows, for great their power to save.
O royal Pæan, for Admetus' ills
Find some relief; assist him, O assist him!
As thou before didst save him, save him now
From death; repress the tyrant's murd'rous haste!

Chorus. Alas, alas! Woe, woe is me! Thou son

Of Pheres, wilt thou bear to live, deprived
Of such a wife? Will not despair unsheath
The self-destroying sword? Will it not find
Some means of violent death? This day thy wife—
Dear should I say? nay, dearest to thy soul—
Shalt thou see dead. But she comes forth, and with
her

Her husband. Groan, thou land of Pheres, raise The cry of mourning; for the best of women Wastes with disease, and drooping to the earth Sinks to th' infernal Pluto's dreary realms. Never will I pronounce the nuptial state To pleasure more allied than grief: of old This often have I noted, chiefly now Viewing my king's affliction, who, bereft Of this sweet excellence, is doomed to pass A solitary life estranged from joy.

ALCESTIS, ADMETUS, EUMELUS, CHORUS.

Alcestis. Thou sun, and thou fair light of day, ye clouds
That in quick eddies whirl along the sky!

Admetus. Sees thee and me most wretched, yet in nought Offending 'gainst the gods that thou shouldst die.

Altestis. O earth, ye tow'red roofs, thou bridal bed Raised in Iolcos, my paternal seat!

Admetus. O thou poor sufferer, raise thee, leave me not; Entreat the powerful gods to pity thee.

Alcestis. I see the two-oared boat, the Stygian barge;
And he, that wafts the dead, grasps in his hand
His pole, and calls me, "Why dost thou delay?
Haste thee; thou lingerest; all is ready here.
Charon impatient speeds me to begone."

Admetus. A melancholy voyage this to me.

O thou unhappy, what a fate is ours!

Alcestis. He drags me, some one drags me to the gates
That close upon the dead; dost thou not see him,
How stern he frowns beneath his gloomy brows,
Th' impetuous Pluto? What wouldst thou with me?
Off, let me go! Ah, what a dreary path,
Wretched, most wretched, must I downwards tread!

Admetus. To thy friends mournful, most to me, and these Thy children, who with me this sorrow share.

Alcestis. No longer hold me up, hold me no longer; Here lay me down: I have not strength to stand; Death is hard by, dark night creeps o'er my eyes. My children, O my children, now no more. Your mother is no more: farewell! May you More happy see the golden light of heaven!

Admetus. Ah, what a mournful word is this! To me Than any death more painful. By the gods, Forsake me not. Shouldst thou be taken from me. I were no more; in thee I live; thy love, Thy sweet society my soul reveres.

Alcestis. Thou seest, Admetus, what to me the Fates Assign; yet, ere I die, I wish to tell thee What lies most near my heart. I honoured thee, And in exchange for thine my forfeit life Devoted; now I die for thee, though free Not to have died, but from Thessalia's chiefs Preferring whom I pleased in royal state To have lived happy here: I had no will To live bereft of thee with these poor orphans; I die without reluctance, though the gifts Of youth are mine to make life grateful to me. Yet he that gave thee birth, and she that bore thee, Deserted thee, though well it had beseemed them With honour to have died for thee, t' have saved Their son with honour, glorious in their death. They had no child but thee, they had no hope Of other offspring shouldst thou die; and I Might thus have lived, thou mightst have lived, till age Crept slowly on, nor wouldst thou heave the sigh Thus of thy wife deprived, nor train alone Thy orphan children. But some god appointed It should be thus: thus be it. Thou to me Requite this kindness; never shall I ask An equal retribution, nothing bears A value high as life: yet my request Is just, thou wilt confess it; for thy love To these our children equals mine, thy soul If wisdom tempers. In their mother's house Let them be lords: wed not again, to set A stepdame o'er my children, some base woman That wants my virtues; she through jealousy

Will work against their lives, because to thee I bore them: do not this, I beg thee do not; For to the offspring of a former bed A stepdame comes sharp as a serpent's tooth. My son, that holds endearing converse with thee, Hath in his father a secure protection. But who, my daughter, shall with honour guide Thy virgin years? What woman shalt thou find, New-wedded to thy father, whose vile arts Will not with slanderous falsehoods taint thy name, And blast thy nuptials in youth's freshest bloom For never shall thy mother see thee led A bride, nor at thy throes speak comfort to thee, Then present when a mother's tenderness Is most alive: for I must die; the ill Waits not a day, but quickly shall I be Numbered amongst the dead. Farewell, be happy And thou, my husband, mayst with honour boast Thou hast been wedded to a virtuous wife: And you, my children, glory in your mother.

Chorus. Fear not: I boldly pledge my faith that this
He will perform, if reason holds her seat.

Admetus. This shall be done, let not such fears disturb thee. It shall be done; for living thou wast mine, And dead thou only shalt be called my wife. Never in thy dear place Thessalian bride Shall call me husband: no, nor other woman, Though from a line of ancient kings she draws Her noble blood, and boasts each peerless grace Of native beauty. I am blest with children, Nor wish I more; in these I pray the gods I may have joy, since all my joy in thee This mourning not one single year, But to my life's last period, shall be borne. How hateful are my parents! for their words Alone were friendly, not their deeds; whilst thou, Paying the dearest forfeit for my life, Hast saved me. Shall I ever cease to mourn. Deprived of such a wife? Hence I renounce The feast, the cheerful guest, the flow'ry wreath And song that used to echo through my house. For never will I touch the lyre again,

Nor to the Libyan flute's sweet measures raise My voice: with thee all my delights are dead. Thy beauteous figure, by the artist's hand Skilfully wrought, shall in my bed be laid; By that reclining, I will clasp it to me. And call it by thy name, and think I hold My dear wife in my arms, and have her yet, Though now no more I have her: cold delight I ween; yet thus th' affliction of my soul Shall I relieve, and visiting my dreams Shalt thou delight me; for to see a friend Is grateful to the soul, come when he will. Though an unreal vision of the night. Had I the voice of Orpheus, and his skill Of power to soothe with my melodious strains The daughter of bright Ceres, or her husband, That from their realms I might receive thee back, I would go down; nor should th' infernal dog, Nor the stern Charon, sitting at his oar To waft the dead, restrain me, till thy life I had restored to the fair light of day. But there await me till I die; prepare A mansion for me, as again with me To dwell; for in thy tomb will I be laid In the same cedar, by thy side composed: For ev'n in death I will not be disjoined From thee, who hast alone been faithful to me. Chorus. For her dear sake thy sorrows will I share As friend with friend; and she is worthy of it. Alcestis. You hear, my children, what your father's words Have promised, not to wed another woman To your discomfort, nor dishonour me. Admetus. I now repeat it; firm shall be my faith.

Alcestis. On this, receive thy children from my hands.

Admetus. A much-loved gift, and from a much-loved hand

Alcestis. Be now, instead of me, a mother to them.

Admetus. If they lose thee, it must indeed be so.

Alcestis. When I should live, I sink among the dead.

Admetus. Ah me, what shall I do bereft of thee!

Alcestis. Time will abate thy grief, the dead is nothing.

Admetus. O lead me, by the gods, lead me down with thee.

Alcestis. Enough, it is enough that I die for thee.

Admetus. O fate, of what a wife dost thou deprive me! Alcestis. A heavy weight hangs on my darkened eye.

Admetus. If thou forsake me, I am lost indeed.

Alcestis. As one that is no more I now am nothing.

Admetus. Ah, raise thy face: do not forsake thy children.

Alcestis. It must be so perforce: farewell, my children!

Admetus, Look on them, but a look!

Alcestis. I am no more.

Admetus. How dost thou? Wilt thou leave us then?

Alcestis. Farewell!

Admetus. And what a wretch, what a lost wretch am I! Chorus. She's gone; thy wife, Admetus, is no more.

Eumelus. O my unhappy fate!

My mother sinks to the dark realms of night,

Nor longer views this golden light;

But to the ills of life exposed Leaves my poor orphan state.

Her eyes, my father, see, her eyes are closed,

And her hand nerveless falls.

Yet hear me, O my mother, hear my cries,

It is thy son that calls,

Who prostrate on the earth breathes on thy lips his sighs.

Admetus. On one that hears not, sees not: I and you Must bend beneath affliction's heaviest load.

Eumelus. Ah, she hath left my youth:

My mother, my dear mother, is no more,

Left me my sufferings to deplore;

Who shall my sorrows soothe?

Thou too, my sister, thy full share shalt know

Of grief, thy heart to rend.

Vain, O my father, vain thy nuptial vows,

Brought to this speedy end;

For, when my mother died, in ruin sunk thy house.

Chorus. Admetus, thou perforce must bear these ills:

Thou'rt not the first, nor shalt thou be the last

Of mortal men, to lose a virtuous wife: For know, death is a debt we all must pay.

Admetus. I know it well; not unawares this ill

Falls on me; I foresaw, and mourned it long. But I will bear the body hence; attend:

And, whilst you wait, raise with alternate voice

The pæan to the ruthless god that rules

Below: and through my realms of Thessaly I give command that all in solemn grief For this dear woman shear their locks, and wear The sable garb of mourning; from your steeds, Whether in pairs they whirl the car, or bear Single the rider's rein, their waving manes Cut close; nor through the city be the sound Of flute or lyre for twelve revolving moons. Never shall I entomb one dearer to me, Or one more kind: these honours from my hands Strophe I. / SA STEA She merits, for she only died for me.

Immortal bliss be thine, Daughter of Pelias in the realms below, Immortal pleasures round thee flow, Though never there the sun's bright beams shall shine.

Be the black-browed Pluto told, And the Stygian boatman old,

Whose rude hands grasp the oar, the rudder guide,

The dead conveying o'er the tide, Let him be told, so rich a freight before

His light skiff never bore;

Tell him that o'er the joyless lakes The noblest of her sex her dreary passage takes.

Strophe 2.

Thy praise the bards shall tell,

When to their hymning voice the echo rings,

Or when they sweep the solemn strings, And wake to rapture the seven-chorded shell,

Or in Sparta's jocund bowers, Circling when the vernal hours

Bring the Carnean feast, whilst through the night

Full-orbed the high moon rolls her light; Or where rich Athens proudly elevate

Shows her magnific state:

Their voice thy glorious death shall raise,

And swell th' enraptured strain to celebrate thy praise.

Antistrophe 1.

O that I had the power,

Could I but bring thee from the shades of night

Again to view this golden light,

To leave that boat, to leave that dreary shore,

Where Cocytus deep and wide Rolls along his sullen tide!

For thou, O best of women, thou alone

For thy lord's life daredst give thy own.

Light lie the earth upon that gentle breast,

And be thou ever blest!

But should he choose to wed again,

Mine and thy children's hearts would hold him in disdain.

Antistrophe 2.

When, to avert his doom,

His mother in the earth refused to lie;

Nor would his ancient father die

To save his son from an untimely tomb;

Though the hand of time had spread Hoar hairs o'er each aged head;

In youth's fresh bloom, in beauty's radiant glow,

The darksome way thou daredst to go, And for thy youthful lord's to give thy life.

Be mine so true a wife;

Though rare the lot: then should I prove Th' indissoluble bond of faithfulness and love.

HERCULES, CHORUS.

Hercules. Ye strangers, citizens of Pheræ, say

If I shall find Admetus in the house.

Chorus. There is the son of Pheres, Hercules.

But what occasion, tell us, brought thee hither

To Thessaly; to Pheræ why this visit?

Hercules. A toil imposed by the Tirynthian king.

Chorus. And whither roving? On what journey bound? Hercules. For the four steeds that whirl the Thracian's car.

Chorus. How to be won; art thou a stranger there? Hercules. A stranger, never on Bistonian ground.

Chorus. These horses are not won without strong contest.

Hercules. The toil, whate'er it be, I could not shun.

Chorus. He must be slain, or death awaits thee there. Hercules. Not the first contest this I have essayed.

Chorus. Shouldst thou o'ercome their lord, what is the prize?

Hercules. His coursers to Eurystheus I shall lead.

Chorus. No slight task in their mouths to place the curb. Hercules. I shall, though from their nostrils they breathe fire.

Chorus. With their fierce jaws they rend the flesh of men. Hercules. So feeds the mountain savage, not the horse.

Chorus. Their mangers shalt thou see all stained with blood.

Hercules. From whom does he that bred them draw his race? Chorus. From Mars this king of golden shielded Thrace.

Hercules. How is this toil assigned me by my fate,

In enterprise so hazardous and high Engaged, that always with the sons of Mars I must join battle? With Lycaon first, With Cygnus next; now with these furious steeds And their proud lord another contest waits me:

But never shall Alcmena's son be seen

To tremble at the fierceness of a foe.

Chorus. But, see, the sceptred ruler of this land, Admetus, from his house advances to thee.

Admetus, Hercules, Chorus.

Admetus. Hail, son of Jove, of Perseus' noble blood. Hercules. Hail thou, Admetus, king of Thessaly. Admetus. I am no stranger to thy friendly wishes.

Hercules. Why are thy locks in sign of mourning shorn? Admetus. 'Tis for one dead, whom I must this day bury. Hercules. The god avert thy mourning for a child!

Hercules. The god avert thy mourning for a child!

Admetus. My children, what I had, live in my house.

Hercules. Thy aged father, haply he is gone.

Admetus. My father lives, and she that bore me lives. Hercules. Lies then thy wife Alcestis 'mongst the dead?

Admetus. Of her I have in double wise to speak.

Hercules. As of the living speakst thou, or the dead?

Admetus. She is, and in no more: this grief afflicts me.

Hercules. This gives no information, dark thy words.

Admetus. Knowst thou not then the destiny assigned her?

Hercules. I know that she submits to die for thee.

Admetus. To this assenting is she not no more? Hercules. Lament her not too soon; await the time.

Admetus. She's dead; one soon to die is now no more.

Hercules. It differs wide to be, or not to be.

Admetus. Such are thy sentiments, far other mine.

Hercules But wherefore are thy tears? What friend is dead?

Admetus. A woman; of a woman made I mention. Hercules. Of foreign birth, or one allied to thee.

Admetus. Of foreign birth, but to my house most dear. Hercules. How in thy house then did she chance to die? Admetus. Her father dead, she came an orphan hither.

Hercules. Would I had found thee with no grief oppressed.

Admetus. With what intent dost thou express thee thus?

Hercules. To seek some other hospitable hearth.

Admetus. Not so, O king; come not so great an ill.

Hercules. To those that mourn a guest is troublesome.

Admetus. Dead are the dead: but enter thou my house.

Hercules. Shame that with those who weep a guest should feast.

Admetus. We have apartments separate, to receive thee. Hercules. Permit me to depart, much will I thank thee.

Admetus. It must not be; no, to another house
Thou must not turn aside. Go thou before;
Ope those apartments of the house which bear
A different aspect; give command to those

Whose charge it is to spread the plenteous table, And bar the doors between: the voice of woe Unseemly heard afflicts the feasting guest.

Chorus. What wouldst thou do, Admetus? Such a grief
Now lying heavy on thee, canst thou bear

T' admit a guest? Doth this bespeak thee wise?

Admetus. If from my house or city I should drive

A coming guest, wouldst thou commend me more? Thou wouldst not: my affliction would not thus Be less, but more unhospitable I; And to my former ills this further ill Be added, I should hear my mansion called The stranger-hating house. Besides, to me His hospitable doors are always open,

Whene'er I tread the thirsty soil of Argos. Chorus. Why didst thou then conceal thy present grief,

A stranger friend arriving, as thou sayst?

Admetus. My gate he would not enter, had he known
Of my affliction aught: yet acting thus
Some may perchance deem me unwise, nor hold me
Worthy of praise; yet never shall my house
Know to dishonour or reject a guest.

CHORUS.

Strophe 1.

Yes, liberal house, with princely state
To many a stranger, many a guest
Oft hast thou oped thy friendly gate,
Oft spread the hospitable feast.
Beneath thy roof Apollo deigned to dwell,
Here strung his silver-sounding shell,
And mixing with thy menial train
Deigned to be called the shepherd of the plain:
And as he drove his flocks along,
Whether the winding vale they rove,
Or linger in the upland grove,
He tuned the pastoral pipe or rural song.

Strophe 2.

Delighted with thy tuneful lay
No more the savage thirsts for blood;
Amidst thy flocks in harmless play
Wantons the lynx's spotted brood;
Pleased from his lair on Othrys' rugged brow
The lion seeks the vale below;
Whilst to thy lyre's melodious sound
The dappled hinds in sportive measures bound;
And as the vocal echo rings,
Lightly their nimble feet they ply,
Leaving their pine-clad forests high,
Charmed with the sweet notes of thy gladdening strings.

Antistrophe 1.

Hence is thy house, Admetus, graced With all that Plenty's hand bestows, Near the sweat-streaming current placed 'That from the lake of Boebia flows. Far to the west extends the wide domain,
Rich-pastured mead and cultured plain;
Its bound, the dark Molossian air,
Where the Sun stations his unharnessed car,
And stretching to his eastern ray,
Where Pelion rising in his pride
Frowns o'er th' Ægean's portless tide,
Reaches from sea to sea thy ample sway.

Antistrophe 2.

Yet wilt thou ope thy gate e'en now,
E'en now wilt thou receive this guest:
Though from thine eye the warm tear flow,
Though sorrow rend thy suffering breast:
Sad tribute to thy wife, who knew in death.

Lamented lies thy roof beneath, But Nature thus her laws decreed,

The generous mind is prompt to generous deed;
For all the power of wisdom lies
Fixed in the righteous bosom: hence
My soul assumes this confidence,
Fair to the virtuous shall Success arise.

ADMETUS, CHORUS.

Admetus. Ye citizens of Pheræ, present here,
Benevolent to me, my dead adorned
With every honour, the attendant train
Are bearing to the tomb and funeral pyre.
Do you, for ancient usage so requires,
Address her as she takes her last sad way.

Chorus. Thy father Pheres! See, his aged foot Advances; his attendants in their hands Bear gorgeous presents, honours to the dead.

PHERES, ADMETUS, CHORUS.

Pheres. I come, my son, joint sufferer in thy griefs;
For thou hast lost a good and virtuous wife,
None will gainsay it; but thou must perforce
Endure this, though severe. These ornaments
Receive, and let her go beneath the earth:
These honours are her due, since for thy life
She died, my son; nor would she I should be

Childless, nor suffered me bereft of thee To waste in grief my sad remains of life. The life of all her sex hath she adorned With added lustre by this generous deed. O thou, that hast preserved my son, and raised Our sinking glories, hail! E'en in the house Of Pluto be thou blest! Such marriages Pronounce I good; others of little worth. Admetus. Thou comest not to these obsequies by me Invited, nor thy presence do I deem She never in thy ornaments Shall be arrayed, nor wants she aught of thine To grace her funeral rites. Then was the time To show thy social sorrow, when my life The Fates demanded: thou couldst stand aloof, Old as thou art, and give a younger up To die; and wouldst thou now bewail her death? Art thou my father? No; nor she, who says She brought me forth, my mother, though so called; But the base offspring of some slave thy wife Stole me, and put me to her breast. Thy deeds Show what thou art by plain and evident proof: And never can I deem myself thy son, Who passest all in mean and abject spirit. At such an age, just trembling on the verge Of life, that wouldst not—nay, thou daredst not—die For thine own son: but you could suffer her, Though sprung from foreign blood. With justice then Her only as my father must I deem, Her only as my mother; yet this course Mightst thou have run with glory, for thy son Daring to die; brief was the space of life That could remain to thee. I then had lived My destined time; she too had lived, nor thus Of her forsaken should I wail my loss. Yet all that makes man happy hadst thou proved, Blest through thy life: in royalty thy youth Grew up; I was thy son t' inherit from thee Thy treasures, that not childless hadst thou died,

To plundering strangers. Neither canst thou say Thou gavest me up to death as one that held

Leaving thy desolated house a prey

Thy age in rude contempt: I honoured thee With holy reverence, requited thus By thee and her that bore me. Other sons Wilt thou not therefore speed thee to beget, To cherish thy old age, to grace thee dead With sumptuous vest, and lay thee in the tomb? That office never shall my hand perform, For, far as in thee lay, I died; if yet I view this light, fortune presenting me Other deliverer, his son I am, With pious fondness to support his age. Unmeaning is the old man's wish to die, Of age complaining and life's lengthened course; For, at th' advance of death, none has the will To die: old age is no more grievous to them.

Chorus. Forbear; enough the present weight of woe.

My son, exasperate not a father's mind. Pheres. Me as some worthless Lydian dost thou rate, My son, or Phrygian slave bought with thy gold? Dost thou not know I am Thessalian born, Of a Thessalian father, truly free? Opprobrious are thy words, reviling me With youthful insolence, not quitted so. I gave thee birth, thence lord of my fair house; I gave thee nurture, that indeed I owed thee, But not to die for thee: such law from nature Received I not, that fathers for their sons Should die, nor does Greece know it. For thyself, Whether misfortune press thee, or thy state Be happier, thou wast born: thou hast from me Whate'er behoves thee: o'er an ample realm Thou now art king, and I shall leave thee more, A large extent of lands; for from my father These I received. In what then have I wronged thee? Or what deprived thee? Die not thou for me. Nor I for thee. Is it to thee a joy To view the light of heaven? and dost thou think Thy father joys not in it? Long I deem The time below? But little is the space Of life, yet pleasant. Thou, devoid of shame, Hast struggled not to die, and thou dost live Passing the bounds of life assigned by fate,

By killing her. My mean and abject spirit
Thou dost rebuke, O thou most timid wretch,
Vanquished e'en by a woman, who for thee,
Her young and beauteous husband, freely died.
A fine device that thou mightst never die,
Couldst thou persuade who at the time might be
Thy wife to die for thee; yet canst thou load
Thy friends with vile reproach, if they decline
To do it, base and timid as thou art.
But hold thy peace; and think, if life be dear
To thee, it must be dear to all. On us,
If thou wilt throw reproaches, thou shalt hear
Enough of thy ill deeds, and nothing false.
Chorus. Too much of ill already hath been spoken:

Forbear, old man, nor thus revile thy son.

Admetus. Say what thou wilt, I have declared my thoughts:

But if it gives thee pain to hear the truth,

Much it behoved thee not to wrong me thus.

Pheres. Had I died for thee, greater were the wrong.

Admetus. Is death alike then to the young and old?

Pheres. With one life ought we live, and not with two.

Admetus. Mayst thou then live a greater age than Jove!

Pheres. And dost thou, nothing injured, curse thy parents?

Admetus. I saw thee fondly coveting long life.

Pheres. Her, that died for thee, wilt thou not entomb?

Admetus. These are the tokens of thy abject spirit.

Pheres. By us she died not, that thou wilt not say.

Admetus. Ah, mayst thou some time come to want my aid!

Pheres. Wed many wives, that more may die for thee.

Admetus. On thee be that reproach, thou wouldst not die. Pheres. Sweet is this light of heaven, sweet is this light. Admetus. Base is thy thought, unworthy of a man.

Pheres. Would it not joy thee to entomb my age?

Admetus. Die when thou wilt, inglorious wilt thou die.

Pheres. An ill report will not affect me dead.

Admetus. Alas, alas, how shameless is old age!

Pheres. She was not shameless, but thou foundst her mad.

Admetus. Begone, and suffer me t' entomb the dead.

Pheres. I go; thou shalt entomb her, as thyself

Her murderer. Look for vengeance from her friends. Acastus is no man, if his hands fail

Dearly t' avenge on thee his sister's blood.

Admetus. Why get thee gone, thou and thy worthy wife;
Grow old together, as you well deserve,
Childless, your son yet living; never more
Meet me beneath this roof. Go! Were it decent
To interdict thee by the herald's voice,
I would forbid thee ever set thy foot
Within this mansion of thy ancestors.
But let us go, since we must bear our ill,
And place her body on the funeral pyre.

Chorus. O thou unhappy, nobly daring woman,
Most generous, brightest excellence, farewell!
Courteous my Hermes and th' infernal king
Receive thee: in those realms if aught of grace
Awaits the virtuous, be those honours thine,
And be thy seat nigh Pluto's royal bride.

Attend. To many a guest ere now, from various realms Arriving, in this mansion have I spread The hospitable feast; but at this hearth A viler than this stranger never shared The bounty of Admetus: though he saw My lord oppressed with grief, it checked him not, He boldly entered; nor with sober cheer Took the refreshment offered, though he knew Th' affliction of the house. If what he would We brought not on the instant, he enforced His harsh commands; and, grasping in his hands A goblet wreathed with ivy, filled it high With the grape's purple juice, and quaffed it off Untempered, till the glowing wine inflamed him; Then, binding round his head a myrtle wreath, Howls dismal discord; two unpleasing strains We heard, his harsh notes, who in nought revered Th' afflictions of Admetus, and the voice Of sorrow through the family that wept Our mistress; yet our tearful eyes we showed not, Admetus so commanded, to the guest. My office bids me wait, and in the house Receive this stranger, some designing knave, Or ruffian robber: she meantime is borne Out of the house, nor did I follow her, Nor stretched my hand lamenting my lost mistress: She was a mother to me, and to all

My fellow-servants; from a thousand ills She saved us, with her gentleness appeasing Our lord when angry: justly do I hate This stranger then, who came amidst our grief.

HERCULES, ATTENDANT.

Hercules. You fellow, why that grave and thoughtful look? Ill it becomes a servant's countenance To frown on strangers, whom he should receive With cheerfulness. A good friend of thy lord Is present: all the welcome he can get From thee, a sullen and contracted brow. Mourning a loss that touches not this house. Come hither, that thou mayst be wiser, friend; Knowst thou the nature of all mortal things? Not thou, I ween; how shouldst thou? Hear from me By all of human race death is a debt That must be paid, and none of mortal men Knows whether till to-morrow life's short space Shall be extended: such the dark events Of fortune; never to be learned, nor traced By any skill. Instructed thus by me Bid pleasure welcome, drink, the life allowed From day to day esteem thine own, all else Fortune's. To Venus chief address thy vows-Of all the heavenly powers she, gentle queen, Kindest to man, and sweetest: all besides Reckless let pass, and listen to my words, If thou seest reason in them, as I think Thou dost: then bid excessive grief farewell, And drink with us; master these present ills, And bind thy brows with garlands; well I know The circling bowl will waft thy spirits to bliss, Now sunk in dark and sullen melancholy. Since we are mortal, be our minds intent On mortal things; to all the grave, whose brows With cares are furrowed, let me judge for thee, Life is no life, but a calamity.

Attend. These things we know; but what becomes us now Ill suits with festal revelry and mirth.

Hercules. A woman dies, one unrelated; check
Thy grief: the lords of this fair mansion live.

Attend. Live Knowst thou not th' afflictions of this house? Hercules. Unless thy lord in something hath deceived me. Attend. Liberal his mind, too liberal to the guest. Hercules. No: for a stranger dead he hath done well. Attend. No stranger, but a near domestic loss. Hercules. Is it some sorrow which he told not me? Attend. Go thou with joy; ours are our lord's afflictions. Hercules. These are not words that speak a foreign loss. Attend. If such, thy revelry had not displeased me. Hercules. Then by my friendly host I much am wronged.

Attend. Thy coming was unseasonable; this house
Wanted no guest: thou seest our locks all shorn,

Our grief and sable vests.

Hercules. Who then is dead?

One of his children, or his aged father? *Attend.* His wife Alcestis, stranger, is no more.

Hercules. What sayst thou? And e'en so could you receive

Attend. It shamed him to reject thee from his house. Hercules. O wretch, of what a wife art thou bereft! Attend. Not she alone, we all are lost with her.

Hercules. I might have thought this when I saw his eye
Flowing with tears, his locks shorn off, and grief
Marked on his face: but he persuaded me,
Saying that one of foreign birth he mourned,
And bore her to the tomb: unwillingly
Ent'ring these gates I feasted in the house,
My hospitable friend with such a grief
Oppressed; nay more, I revelled, and my head
With garlands shaded: but the fault was thine,
Who didst not tell me that a woe like this
Thy house afflicted. But inform me where
She is interred: where shall I find her tomb?

Attend. Right in the way that to Larissa leads
Without the city wilt thou find her tomb.

Hercules. Now my firm heart, and thou, my daring soul,
Show what a son the daughter of Electryon,
Alcmena of Tirynthia, bore to Jove.
This lady, new in death, behoves me save,
And, to Admetus rend'ring grateful service,
Restore his lost Alcestis to his house.
This sable-vested tyrant of the dead

My eye shall watch, not without hope to find him Drinking th' oblations nigh the tomb. If once Seen from my secret stand I rush upon him, These arms shall grasp him till his panting sides Labour for breath; and who shall force him from me. Till he gives back this woman? Should I fail To seize him there, as coming not to taste The spilt blood's thickening foam, I will descend To the drear house of Pluto and his queen, Which the sun never cheers, and beg her thence, Assured that I shall lead her back, and place her In my friend's hands, whose hospitable heart Received me in his house, nor made excuse, Though pierced with such a grief; this he concealed Through generous thought an reverence to his friend. Who in Thessalia bears a warmer love To strangers? Who, through all the realms of Greece? It never shall be said this generous man Received in me a base and worthless wretch.

Admetus, Chorus.

Admetus. Ah me! Ah me! How mournful this approach!
How hateful to my sight this widowed house!
Ah, whither shall I go? where shall I rest?
What shall I say? or what forbear to say?
How may I sink beneath this weight of woe?
To misery was I born, wretch that I am;
I envy now the dead, I long for them,
Long to repose me in that house. No more
With pleasure shall I view the sun's fair beams,
No more with pleasure walk upon this earth:
So dear an hostage death has rent from me,
And yielded to th' infernal king his prey.

Chorus. Go forward, yet go forward; to thy house Retire.

Admetus. Ah me!

Chorus. Thy sufferings do indeed Demand these groans.

Admetus. O miserable me!
Chorus. Thy steps are set in sorrow, well I know,
But all thy sorrow nought avails the dead.

Admetus. Wretch that I am!

Chorus. To see thy wife no more,

No more to see her face, is grief indeed.

Admetus. O, thou hast touched on that which deepest wounds

My mind: what greater ill can fall on man

Than of a faithful wife to be deprived?

O that I ne'er had wedded in the house

O that I ne'er had wedded, in the house
Had ne'er dwelt with her! The unmarried state
I envy, and deem those supremely blest
Who have no children; in one single life
To mourn is pain that may be well endured.
To see our children wasting with disease,
To see death ravaging our nuptial bed,
This is not to be borne, when we might pass

Our lives without a child, without a wife. Chorus. Fate comes, resistless Fate.

Admetus. Unhappy me! Chorus. But to thy sorrows wilt thou put no bounds?

Admetus. Woe, woe, woe, woe!

Chorus. A ponderous weight indeed
To bear, yet bear them. Thou art not the first

That lost a wife: misery, in different forms To different men appearing, seizes all.

Admetus. Ye lasting griefs, ye sorrows for our friends
Beneath the earth! Ah, why did ye restrain me?
I would have cast myself into the tomb,
The gaping tomb, and lain in death with her,
The dearest, best of women; there for one
Pluto had coupled two most faithful souls,
Together passing o'er th' infernal lake.

Chorus. I had a friend, by birth allied to me,
Whose son, and such a son as claimed his tears,
Died in the prime of youth, his only child;
Yet with the firmness of a man he bore
His grief, though childless, and declining age
Led him with hasty steps to hoary hairs.

Admetus. Thou goodly mansion, how shall I endure
To enter thee, how dwell beneath thy roof,
My state thus sunk! Ah me, how changed from that,
When 'midst the pines of Pelion blazing round,
And hymeneal hymns, I held my way,
And led my loved Alcestis by her hand:

The festal train with many a cheerful shout Saluted her, now dead, and me, and hailed Our union happy, as descended each From generous blood and high-born ancestry. Now for the nuptial song, the voice of woe—For gorgeous robes, this black and mournful garb—Attends me to my halls, and to my couch, Where solitary sorrow waits me now.

Chorus. This sorrow came upon thee 'midst a state
Of happiness, a stranger thou to ills:
Yet is thy life preserved: thy wife is dead,
Leaving thy love; is there aught new in this?
Many hath death reft of their wives before.

Admetus. My friends, I deem the fortune of my wife Happier than mine, though otherwise it seems; For never more shall sorrow touch her breast, And she with glory rests from various ills. But I, who ought not live, my destined hour O'erpassing, shall drag on a mournful life, Late taught what sorrow is. How shall I bear To enter here? To whom shall I address My speech? Whose greeting renders my return Delightful? Which way shall I turn? Within In lonely sorrow shall I waste away, As widowed of my wife I see my couch, The seats deserted where she sate, the rooms Wanting her elegance. Around my knees My children hang, and weep their mother lost: These too lament their mistress now no more. This is the scene of misery in my house: Abroad, the nuptials of Thessalia's youth And the bright circles of assembled dames Will but augment my grief: ne'er shall I bear To see the loved companions of my wife. And if one hates me, he will say, "Behold The man, who basely lives, who dared not die, But, giving through the meanness of his soul His wife, avoided death, yet would be deemed A man: he hates his parents, yet himself Had not the spirit to die." These ill reports Cleave to me: why then wish for longer life, On evil tongues thus fallen, and evil days?

CHORUS.

Strophe 1.

My vent'rous foot delights
To tread the Muses' arduous heights;
Their hallowed haunts I love t' explore,
And listen to their lore:

And listen to their lore:
Yet never could my searching mind
Aught, like necessity, resistless find;
No herb of sovereign power to save,
Whose virtues Orpheus joyed to trace,
And wrote them in the rolls of Thrace;
Nor all that Phœbus gave,

Instructing the Asclepian train,
When various ills the human frame assail,
To heal the wound, to soothe the pain,
'Gainst her stern force avail.

Antistrophe 1.

Of all the powers divine
Alone none dares approach her shrine;
To her no hallowed image stands,
No altar she commands;
In vain the victim's blood would flow;
She never deigns to hear the suppliant vow.
Never to me mayst thou appear,
Dread goddess, with severer mien,
That oft in life's past tranquil scene
Thou hast been known to wear.

By thee Jove works his stern behest:
Thy force subdues e'en Scythia's stubborn steel:
Nor ever does thy rugged breast
The touch of pity feel.

Strophe 2.

And now, with ruin pleased,
On thee, O king, her hands have seized,
And bound thee in her iron chain:
Yet her fell force sustain.
For from the gloomy realms of night

No tears recall the dead to life's sweet light;

No virtue, though to heaven allied, Saves from th' inevitable doom: Heroes and sons of gods have died, And sunk into the tomb.

Dear, whilst our eyes her presence blest, Dear, in the gloomy mansions of the dead; Most generous she, the noblest, best Who graced thy nuptial bed.

Antistrophe 2.

Thy wife's sepulchral mound
Deem not as common, worthless ground,
That swells their breathless bodies o'er
Who die, and are no more.

No: be it honoured as a shrine Raised high, and hallowed to some power divine.

The traveller, as he passes by,
Shall thither bend his devious way,
With reverence gaze, and with a sigh
Smite on his breast, and say,
"She died of old to save her lord;

Now blest among the blest: Hail, power revered;
To us thy wonted grace afford!"

Such vows shall be preferred. But see, Admetus, to thy house, I ween, Alcmena's son bends his returning steps.

HERCULES, ADMETUS, CHORUS.

Hercules. I would speak freely to my friend, Admetus,
Nor what I blame keep secret in my breast.
I came to thee amidst thy ills, and thought
I had been worthy to be proved thy friend.
Thou toldst me not the obsequies prepared
Were for thy wife, but in thy house receivdst me
As if thou grievdst for one of foreign birth.
I bound my head with garlands, to the gods
Pouring libations in thy house with grief
Oppressed. I blame this: yes, in such a state
I blame this: yet I come not in thine ills
To give thee pain; why I return in brief
Will I unfold. This woman from my hands
Receive to thy protection, till returned

I bring the Thracian steeds, having there slain The proud Bistonian tyrant; should I fail, Be that mischance not mine, for much I wish Safe to revisit thee, yet should I fail, I give her to the safeguard of thy house. For with much toil she came into my hands. To such as dare contend some public games, Which well deserved my toil, I find proposed, I bring her thence, she is the prize of conquest; For slight assays each victor led away A courser; but for those of harder proof The conqueror was rewarded from the herd, And with some female graced: victorious there, A prize so noble it were base to slight. Take her to thy protection, not by stealth Obtained, but the reward of many toils; The time perchance may come when thou wilt thank me.

Admetus. Not that I slight thy friendship, or esteem thee Other than noble, wished I to conceal My wife's unhappy fate; but to my grief It had been added grief, if thou hadst sought Elsewhere the rites of hospitality; Suffice it that I mourn ills which are mine. This woman, if it may be, give in charge, I beg thee, king, to some Thessalian else, That hath not cause like me to grieve; in Pheræ Thou mayst find many friends; call not my woes Fresh to my memory; never in my house Could I behold her but my tears would flow; To sorrow add not sorrow; now enough I sink beneath its weight. Where should her youth With me be guarded? for her gorgeous vests Proclaim her young; if mixing with the men She dwell beneath my roof, how shall her fame, Conversing with the youths, be kept unsullied? It is not easy to restrain the warmth Of that intemperate age; my care for thee Warns me of this. Or if from them removed I hide her in th' apartments late my wife's, How to my bed admit her? I should fear A double blame; my citizens would scorn me

As light, and faithless to the kindest wife
That died for me, if to her bed I took
Another blooming bride; and to the dead
Behoves me pay the highest reverence
Due to her merit. And thou, lady, know,
Whoe'er thou art, that form, that shape, that air
Resembles my Alcestis. By the gods,
Remove her from my sight. It is too much,
I cannot bear it: when I look on her,
Methinks I see my wife; this wounds my heart,
And calls the tears fresh gushing from my eyes.
This is the bitterness of grief indeed.

Chorus. I cannot praise thy fortune; but behoves thee
To bear with firmness what the gods assign.

Hercules. O that from Jove I had the power to bring
Back from the mansions of the dead thy wife
To heaven's fair light, that grace achieving for thee!

Admetus. I know thy friendly will. But how can this

Admetus. I know thy friendly will. But how can this Be done? The dead return not to this light.

Hercules. Check then thy swelling griefs; with reason rule them.

Admetus. How easy to advise, but hard to bear!

Hercules. What would it profit shouldst thou always groan?

Admetus. I know it; but I am in love with grief.

Hercules. Love to the dead calls forth the ceaseless tear.

Admetus. O, I am wretched more than words can speak.

Hercules. A good wife hast thou lost, who can gainsay it?

Admetus. Never can life be pleasant to me more.

Hercules. Thy sorrow now is new, time will abate it.

Admetus. Time, sayst thou? Yes, the time that brings me death.

Hercules. Some young and lovely bride will bid it cease.

Admetus. No more: what sayst thou? Never could I think—

Hercules. Wilt thou still lead a lonely, widowed life?

Admetus. Never shall other woman share my bed.

Hercules. And think'st thou this will aught avail the dead?

Admetus. This honour is her due, where'er she be.

Hercules. This hath my praise, though near allied to frenzy.

Admetus. Praise me, or not, I ne'er will wed again.

Hercules. I praise thee that thou'rt faithful to thy wife.

Admetus. Though dead, if I betray her may I die!

Hercules. Well, take this noble lady to thy house.

Admetus. No, by thy father Jove let me entreat thee.

Hercules. Not to do this would be the greatest wrong.

Admetus. To do it would with anguish rend my heart.

Hercules. Let me prevail; this grace may find its meed.

Admetus. O that thou never hadst received this prize!

Hercules. Yet in my victory thou art victor with me.

Admetus. 'Tis nobly said: yet let this woman go. Hercules. If she must go, she shall: but must she go? Admetus. She must, if I incur not thy displeasure.

Hercules. There is a cause that prompts my earnestness.

Admetus. Thou hast prevailed, but much against my will.

Hercules. The time will come when thou wilt thank me

for it.

Admetus. Well, if I must receive her, lead her in.

Hercules. Charge servants with her! No, that must not be.

Admetus. Lead her thyself then, if thy will incline thee. Hercules. No, to thy hand alone will I commit her.

Admetus. I touch her not; but she hath leave to enter.

Hercules. I shall entrust her only to thy hand.

Admetus. Thou dost constrain me, king, against my will. Hercules. Venture to stretch thy hand, and touch the

stranger's.

Admetus. I touch her, as I would the headless Gorgon.

Hercules. Hast thou her hand?

Admetus. I have.

Hercules. Then hold her safe.

Hereafter thou wilt say the son of Jove

Hath been a generous guest: view now her face, See if she bears resemblance to thy wife,

And thus made happy bid farewell to grief.

Admetus. O gods, what shall I say? 'Tis marvellous, Exceeding hope. See I my wife indeed?

Or doth some god distract me with false joy?

Hercules. In very deed dost thou behold thy wife.

Admetus. See that it be no phantom from beneath.

Hercules. Make not thy friend one that evokes the shades.

Admetus. And do I see my wife, whom I entombed? Hercules. I marvel not that thou art diffident.

dercutes. I marver not that thou art difficent.

Admetus. I touch her; may I speak to her as living?

Hercules. Speak to her; thou hast all thy heart could wish.

Admetus. Dearest of women, do see I again

That face, that person? This exceeds all hope: I never thought that I should see thee more.

Hercules. Thou hast her; may no god be envious to thee. Admetus. O, be thou blest, thou generous son of Jove!

Thy father's might protect thee! Thou alone Hast raised her to me; from the realms below How hast thou brought her to the light of life?

Hercules. I fought with him that lords it o'er the shades. Admetus. Where with the gloomy tyrant didst thou fight? Hercules. I lay in wait, and seized him at the tomb.

Admetus. But wherefore doth my wife thus speechless stand?

Hercules. It is not yet permitted that thou hear

Her voice addressing thee, till from the gods That rule beneath she be unsanctified With hallowed rites, and the third morn return. But lead her in: and as thou'rt just in all Besides, Admetus, see thou reverence strangers. Farewell: I go t' achieve the destined toil For the imperial son of Sthenelus.

Admetus. Abide with us, and share my friendly hearth. Hercules. That time will come again; this demands speed.

Admetus. Success attend thee; safe mayst thou return.

Now to my citizens I give in charge, And to each chief, that for this blest event They institute the dance, let the steer bleed, And the rich altars, as they pay their vows, Breathe incense to the gods; for now I rise To better life, and grateful own the blessing.

Chorus. With various hand the gods dispense our fates: Now showering various blessings, which our hopes Dared not aspire to; now controlling ills We deemed inevitable; thus the god To these hath given an end exceeding thought. Such is the fortune of this happy day.

MEDEA

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

NURSE OF MEDEA. ATTENDANT ON THE CHILDREN. CHORUSOF CORINTHIAN WOMEN. CREON.

IASON. MESSENGER. THE TWO SONS OF JASON AND MEDEA.

Scene. - BEFORE THE PALACE OF CREON AT CORINTH.

NURSE.

AH! would to heaven the Argo ne'er had urged Its rapid voyage to the Colchian strand 'Twixt the Cyanean rocks, nor had the pine Been fell in Pelion's forests, nor the hands Of those illustrious chiefs, who that famed bark Ascended to obtain, the golden fleece For royal Pelias, plied the stubborn oar; So to Iolchos' turrets had my Queen Medea never sailed, her soul with love For Jason smitten, nor, as since her arts Prevailed on Pelias' daughters to destroy Their father, in this realm of Corinth dwelt An exile with her husband and her sons; Thus to the citizens whose land received her Had she grown pleasing, and in all his schemes Assisted Jason: to the wedded pair, Hence bliss supreme arises, when the bond Of concord joins them: now their souls are filled With ruthless hate, and all affection's lost: For false to his own sons, and her I serve. With a new consort of imperial birth Sleeps the perfidious Jason, to the daughter Of Creon wedded, lord of these domains. The wretched scorned Medea oft exclaims. "O by those oaths, by that right hand thou gav'st The pledge of faith!" She then invokes the gods To witness what requital she hath found From Jason. On a couch she lies, no food Receiving, her whole frame subdued by grief;

And since she marked the treachery of her lord Melts into tears incessant, from the ground Her eyes she never raises, never turns Her face aside, but steadfast as a rock, Or as the ocean's rising billows, hears The counsels of her friends, save when she weeps In silent anguish, with her snowy neck Averted, for her sire, her native land, And home, which she forsaking hither came With him who scorns her now. She from her woes Too late hath learnt how enviable the lot Of those who leave not their paternal roof. She even hates her children, nor with joy Beholds them: much I dread lest she contrive Some enterprise unheard of, for her soul Is vehement, nor will she tamely brook Injurious treatment; well, full well I know Her temper, which alarms me, lest she steal Into their chamber, where the genial couch Is spread, and with the sword their vitals pierce, Or to the slaughter of the bridegroom add That of the monarch, and in some mischance, Yet more severe than death, herself involve: For dreadful is her wrath, nor will the object Of her aversion gain an easy triumph. But lo, returning from the race, her sons Draw near: they think not of their mother's woes, For youthful souls are strangers to affliction.

ATTENDANT, with the Sons of Jason and Medea, Nurse.

Attend. O thou, who for a length of time hast dwelt
Beneath the roofs of that illustrious dame
I serve, why stand'st thou at these gates alone
Repeating to thyself a doleful tale:
Or wherefore by Medea from her presence
Art thou dismissed?

Old man, O you who tend
On Jason's sons, to faithful servants aught
Of evil fortune that befalls their lords
Is a calamity: but such a pitch
Of grief am I arrived at, that I felt

An impulse which constrained me to come forth From these abodes, and to the conscious earth And heaven proclaim the lost Medea's fate.

Attend. Cease not the plaints of that unhappy dame? Nurse. Your ignorance I envy: for her woes

Are but beginning, nor have yet attained

Their mid career.

O how devoid of reason, Attend. If we with terms thus harsh may brand our lords, Of ills more recent nothing yet she knows.

Nurse. Old man, what mean you? Scruple not to speak.

Attend. Nought. What I have already said repents me.

Nurse. I by that beard conjure you not to hide The secret from your faithful fellow-servant. For I the strictest silence will observe If it be needful.

Attend Some one I o'erheard

(Appearing not to listen, as I came Where aged men sit near Pirene's fount And hurl their dice) say that from Corinth's land Creon, the lord of these domains, will banish The children with their mother; but I know not Whether th' intelligence be true, and wish It may prove otherwise.

Nurse. Will Jason brook Such an injurious treatment of his sons, Although he be at variance with their mother

Attend. By new connections are all former ties Dissolved, and he no longer is a friend To this neglected race.

Nurse. We shall be plunged In utter ruin, if to our old woes, Yet unexhausted, any fresh we add.

Attend. Be silent, and suppress the dismal tale, For 'tis unfit our royal mistress know.

Nurse. Hear, O ye children, how your father's soul Is turned against you: still, that he may perish I do not pray, because he is my lord; Yet treacherous to his friends hath he been found.

Attend. Who is not treacherous? Hast thou lived so long

Without discerning how self-love prevails

O'er social? Some by glory, some by gain, Are prompted. Then what wonder, for the sake Of a new consort, if the father slight These children?

Keep them as far as possible away,
Nor suffer them to come into the presence
Of their afflicted mother; for her eyes
Have I just seen with wild distraction fired,
As if some horrid purpose against them
She meant to execute; her wrath I know
Will not be pacified, till on some victim
It like a thunderbolt from Heaven descends;
May she assail her foes alone, nor aim

The stroke at those she ought to hold most dear.

Medea. [within.] Ah me! how grievous are my woes!

What means

Can I devise to end this hated life?

Nurse. 'Tis as I said: strong agitations seize
Your mother's heart, her choler's raised. Dear
children,

Beneath these roofs hie instantly, nor come
Into her sight, accost her not, beware
Of these ferocious manners and the rage
Which boils in that ungovernable spirit.
Go with the utmost speed, for I perceive
Too clearly that her plaints, which in thick clouds
Arise at first, will kindle ere 'tis long
With tenfold violence. What deeds of horror
From that high-soaring, that remorseless soul,
May we expect, when goaded by despair!

[Exeunt Attendant and Sons.

Medea. [within.] I have endured, alas! I have endured—
Wretch that I am!—such agonies as call
For loudest plaints. Ye execrable sons
Of a devoted mother, perish ye
With your false sire, and perish his whole house!

Nurse. Why should the sons—ah, wretched me!—partake
Their father's guilt? Why hat'st thou them? Ah me!
How greatly, O ye children, do I fear
Lest mischief should befall you: for the souls
Of kings are prone to cruelty, so seldom

Subdued, and over others wont to rule,
That it is difficult for such to change
Their angry purpose. Happier I esteem
The lot of those who still are wont to live
Among their equals. May I thus grow old,
If not in splendour, yet with safety blest!
For first of all, renown attends the name
Of mediocrity, and to mankind
Such station is more useful: but not long
Can the extremes of grandeur ever last;
And heavier are the curses which it brings
When Fortune visits us in all her wrath.

Chorus, Nurse.

Chorus. The voice of Colchos' hapless dame I heard—A clamorous voice, nor yet is she appeased.

Speak, O thou aged matron, for her cries
I from the innermost apartment heard;
Nor can I triumph in the woes with which
This house is visited; for to my soul
Dear are its interests.

Nurse. This whole house is plunged

In ruin, and its interests are no more. While Corinth's palace to our lord affords A residence, within her chamber pines My mistress, and the counsels of her friends Afford no comfort to her tortured soul.

Medea. [within.] O that a flaming thunderbolt from Heaven Would pierce this brain! for what can longer life To me avail? Fain would I seek repose In death, and cast away this hated being.

Chorus. Heard'st thou, all-righteous Jove, thou fostering earth,
And thou, O radiant lamp of day, what plaints,
What clamorous plaints this miserable wife
Hath uttered? Through insatiable desire,
Ah why would you precipitate your death?
O most unwise! These imprecations spare.
What if your lord's affections are engaged
By a new bride, reproach him not, for Jove
Will be the dread avenger of your wrongs;
Nor melt away with unavailing grief,
Weeping for the lost partner of your bed.

Medea. [within.] Great Themis and Diana, awful queen,
Do ye behold the insults I endure,
Though by each oath most holy I have bound
That execrable husband. May I see
Him and his bride, torn limb from limb, bestrew
The palace; me have they presumed to wrong,
Although I ne'er provoked them. O my sire,
And thou my native land, whence I with shame
Departed when my brother I had slain.

Nurse. Heard ye not all she said, with a loud voice Invoking Themis, who fulfils the vow,
And Jove, to whom the tribes of men look up
As guardian of their oaths. Medea's rage
Can by no trivial vengeance be appeased.

Chorus. Could we but draw her hither, and prevail
On her to hear the counsels we suggest,
Then haply might she check that bitter wrath,
That vehemence of temper; for my zeal
Shall not be spared to aid my friends. But go,
And say, "O hasten, ere to those within
Thou do some mischief, for these sorrows rush
With an impetuous tempest on thy soul."

Nurse. This will I do; though there is cause to fear That on my mistress I shall ne'er prevail: Yet I my labour gladly will bestow. Though such a look she on her servants casts As the ferocious lioness who guards Her tender young, when anyone draws near To speak to her. Thou wouldst not judge amiss. In charging folly and a total want Of wisdom on the men of ancient days. Who for their festivals invented hymns, And to the banquet and the genial board Confined those actions which o'er human life Diffuse ecstatic pleasures: but no artist Hath yet discovered, by the tuneful song, And varied modulations of the lyre, How we those piercing sorrows may assuage Whence slaughters and such horrid mischief spring As many a prosperous mansion have o'erthrown. Could music interpose her healing aid In these inveterate maladies, such gift

Had been the first of blessings to mankind:
But, 'midst choice viands and the circling bowl,
Why should those minstrels strain their useless throat?
To cheer the drooping heart, convivial joys
Are in themselves sufficient.

[Exit Nurse.]

Chorus. Mingled groans

And lamentations burst upon mine ear:
She in the bitterness of soul exclaims
Against her impious husband, who betrayed
His plighted faith. By grievous wrongs opprest,
She the vindictive gods invokes, and Themis,
Jove's daughter, guardian of the sacred oath,
Who o'er the waves to Greece benignly steered
Their bark adventurous, launched in midnight gloom,
Through ocean's gates which never can be closed!

MEDEA, CHORUS.

Medea. From my apartment, ye Corinthian dames, Lest ye my conduct censure, I come forth: For I have known full many who obtained Fame and high rank; some to the public gaze Stood ever forth, while others, in a sphere More distant, chose their merits to display: Nor yet a few, who, studious of repose. Have with malignant obloquy been called Devoid of spirit: for no human eyes Can form a just discernment; at one glance, Before the inmost secrets of the heart Are clearly known, a bitter hate 'gainst him Who never wronged us they too oft inspire. But 'tis a stranger's duty to adopt The manners of the land in which he dwells: Nor can I praise that native, led astray By mere perverseness and o'erweening folly, Who bitter enmity incurs from those Of his own city. But, alas! my friends, This unforeseen calamity hath withered The vigour of my soul. I am undone, Bereft of every joy that life can yield, And therefore wish to die. For as to him, My husband, whom it did import me most To have a thorough knowledge of, he proves

The worst of men. But sure among all those Who have with breath and reason been endued. We women are the most unhappy race. First, with abundant gold are we constrained To buy a husband, and in him receive A haughty master. Still doth there remain One mischief than this mischief yet more grievous, The hazard whether we procure a mate Worthless or virtuous: for divorces bring Reproach to woman, nor must she renounce The man she wedded; as for her who comes Where usages and edicts, which at home She learnt not, are established, she the gift Of divination needs to teach her how A husband must be chosen: if aright These duties we perform, and he the yoke Of wedlock with complacency sustains, Ours is a happy life; but if we fail In this great object, better 'twere to die. For, when afflicted by domestic ills, A man goes forth, his choler to appease, And to some friend or comrade can reveal What he endures; but we to him alone For succour must look up. They still contend That we, at home remaining, lead a life Exempt from danger, while they launch the spear: False are these judgments; rather would I thrice, Armed with a target, in th' embattled field Maintain my stand, than suffer once the throes Of childbirth. \ But this language suits not you: This is your native city, the abode Of your loved parents, every comfort life Can furnish is at hand, and with your friends You here converse: but I, forlorn, and left Without a home, am by that husband scorned Who carried me from a Barbarian realm. Nor mother, brother, or relation now Have I, to whom I 'midst these storms of woe, Like an auspicious haven, can repair. Thus far I therefore crave ye will espouse My interests, as if haply any means Or any stratagem can be devised

For me with justice to avenge these wrongs On my perfidious husband, on the king Who to that husband's arms his daughter gave, And the new-wedded princess; to observe Strict silence. For although at other times A woman, filled with terror, is unfit For battle, or to face the lifted sword, She when her soul by marriage wrongs is fired, Thirsts with a rage unparalleled for blood.

Chorus. The silence you request I will observe,
For justly on your lord may you inflict
Severest vengeance: still I wonder not
If your disastrous fortunes you bewail:
But Creon I behold who wields the sceptre
Of these domains; the monarch hither comes
His fresh resolves in person to declare.

This nesh lessolves in person to declar

Creon. Thee, O Medea, who, beneath those looks
Stern and forbidding, harbour'st 'gainst thy lord
Resentment, I command to leave these realms
An exile; for companions of thy flight
Take both thy children with thee, nor delay.
Myself pronounce this edict: I my home
Will not revisit, from the utmost bounds
Of this domain, till I have cast thee forth.

Medea. Ah, wretched me! I utterly am ruined:
For in the swift pursuit, my ruthless foes,
Each cable loosing, have unfurled their sails,
Nor can I land on any friendly shore
To save myself, yet am resolved to speak,
Though punishment impend. What cause, O Creon
Have you for banishing me?

Creon. Thee I dread

(No longer is it needful to disguise
My thoughts) lest 'gainst my daughter thou contrive
Some evil such as medicine cannot reach.
Full many incidents conspire to raise
This apprehension: with a deep-laid craft
Art thou endued, expert in the device
Of mischiefs numberless, thou also griev'st
Since thou art severed from thy husband's bed

I am informed, too, thou hast menaced vengeance 'Gainst me, because my daughter I bestowed In marriage, and the bridegroom, and his bride. Against these threats I therefore ought to guard Before they take effect; and better far Is it for me, O woman, to incur Thy hatred now, than, soothed by thy mild words, Hereafter my forbearance to bewail.

Medea. Not now, alas! for the first time, but oft To me, O Creon, hath opinion proved Most baleful, and the source of grievous woes. Nor ever ought the man, who is possest Of a sound judgment, to train up his children To be too wise: for they who live exempt From war and all its toils, the odious name Among their fellow-citizens acquire Of abject sluggards. If to the unwise You some fresh doctrine broach, you are esteemed Not sapient, but a trifler: when to those Who in their own conceit possess each branch Of knowledge, you in state affairs obtain Superior fame, to them you grow obnoxious. I also feel the grievance I lament; Some envy my attainments, others think My temper uncomplying, though my wisdom Is not transcendent. But from me it seems You apprehend some violence; dismiss Those fears: my situation now is such, O Creon, that to monarchs I can give No umbrage: and in what respect have you Treated me with injustice? You bestowed Your daughter where your inclination led. Though I abhor my husband, I suppose That you have acted wisely, nor repine At your prosperity. Conclude the match; Be happy: but allow me in this land Yet to reside; for I my wrongs will bear In silence, and to my superiors yield. Soft is the sound of thy persuasive words, But in my soul I feel the strongest dread Lest thou devise some mischief, and now less

Than ever can I trust thee; for 'gainst those

Of hasty tempers with more ease we guard,
Or men or women, than the silent foe
Who acts with prudence. Therefore be thou gone
With speed, no answer make: it is decreed,
Nor hast thou art sufficient to avert
Thy doom of banishment; for well aware
Am I thou hat'st me.

Medea. Spare me, by those knees
And your new-wedded daughter, I implore.

Creon. Lavish of words, thou never shalt persuade me.

Medea. Will you then drive me hence, and to my prayers

No reverence yield?

Creon. I do not love thee more Than those of my own house.

Medea. With what regret
Do I remember thee, my native land

Creon. Except my children, I hold nought so dear. Medea. To mortals what a dreadful scourge is love! Creon. As fortune dictates, love becomes, I ween,

Either a curse or blessing.

Medea. Righteous Jove,
Let not the author of my woes escape thee.

Creon. Away vain woman, free me from my cares.

Medea. No lack of cares have I.

Creon. Thou from this spot Shalt by my servants' hands ere long be torn.

Medea. Not thus, O Creon, I your mercy crave. Creon. To trouble me, it seems, thou art resolved. Medea. I will depart, nor urge this fond request.

Creon. Why dost thou struggle then, nor from our realm

Withdraw thyself?

Medea. Allow me this one day
Here to remain, till my maturer thoughts
Instruct me to what region I can fly,
Where for my sons find shelter, since their sire
Attends not to the welfare of his race.
Take pity on them, for you also know
What 'tis to be a parent, and must feel
Parental love: as for myself, I heed not
The being doomed to exile, but lament
Their hapless fortunes.

Creon. No tyrannic rage

Within this bosom dwells, but pity oft
Hath warped my better judgment, and though now
My error I perceive, shall thy bequest
Be granted. Yet of this must I forewarn thee:
If when to-morrow with his orient beams
Phoebus the world revisits, he shall view
Thee and thy children still within the bounds
Of these domains, thou certainly shalt die—
Th' irrevocable sentence is pronounced.
But if thou needs must tarry, tarry here
This single day, for in so short a space
Thou canst not execute the ills I dread. [Exit Creon.

Chorus. Alas! thou wretched woman, overpowered By thy afflictions, whither wilt thou turn? What hospitable board, what mansion, find. Or country to protect thee from these ills? Into what storms of misery have the gods Caused thee to rush!

Medea.

On every side distress Assails me: who can contradict this truth? Yet think not that my sorrows thus shall end. By you new-wedded pair must be sustained Dire conflicts, and no light or trivial woes By them who in affinity are joined With this devoted house. Can ye suppose That I would e'er have soothed him, had no gain Or stratagem induced me? Else to him Never would I have spoken, nor once raised My suppliant hands. But now is he so lost In folly, that, when all my schemes with ease He might have baffled, if he from this land Had cast me forth, he grants me to remain For this one day, and ere the setting sun Three of my foes will I destroy—the sire, The daughter, and my husband: various means Have I of slaving them, and, O my friends, Am at a loss to fix on which I first Shall undertake, or to consume with flames The bridal mansion, or a dagger plunge Into their bosoms, entering unperceived The chamber where they sleep. But there remains One danger to obstruct my path: if caught

Stealing into the palace, and intent On such emprise, in death shall I afford A subject of derision to my foes. This obvious method were the best, in which I am most skilled, to take their lives away By sorceries. Be it so; suppose them dead. What city will receive me for its guest, What hospitable foreigner afford A shelter in his land, or to his hearth Admit, or snatch me from impending fate? Alas! I have no friend. I will delay A little longer therefore; if perchance, To screen me from destruction, I can find Some fortress, then I in this deed of blood With artifice and silence will engage; But, if by woes inextricable urged Too closely, snatching up the dagger them Am I resolved to slay, although myself Must perish too; for courage unappalled This bosom animates. By that dread queen, By her whom first of all th' immortal powers I worship, and to aid my bold emprise Have chosen, the thrice awful Hecaté, Who in my innermost apartment dwells, Not one of them shall triumph in the pangs With which they wound my heart; for I will render

This spousal rite to them a plenteous source Of bitterness and mourning—they shall rue Their union, rue my exile from this land. But now come on, nor, O Medea, spare Thy utmost science to devise and frame Deep stratagems, with swift career advance To deeds of horror. Such a strife demands Thy utmost courage. Hast thou any sense Of these indignities? Nor is it fit That thou, who spring'st from an illustrious sire, And from that great progenitor the sun, Shouldst be derided by the impious brood Of Sisyphus, at Jason's nuptial feast Exposed to scorn: for thou hast ample skill To right thyself. Although by Nature formed

Without a genius apt for virtuous deeds, We women are in mischiefs most expert.

CHORUS.

ODE.

Stasium.

I. I.

Now upward to their source the rivers flow, And in a retrogade career

Justice and all the baffled virtues go.

The views of man are insincere,
Nor to the gods though he appeal,

And with an oath each promise seal,
Can be be trusted. Yet doth veering fame
Loudly assert the female claim,
Causing our sex to be renowned,
And our whole lives with glory crowned.
No longer shall we mourn the wrongs
Of slanderous and inhuman tongues.

I. 2.

Nor shall the Muses, as in ancient days, Make the deceit of womankind

The constant theme of their malignant lays.

For ne'er on our uncultured mind
Hath Phœbus, god of verse, bestowed
Genius to frame the lofty ode;

Else had we waked the lyre, and in reply
With descants on man's infamy
Oft lengthened out th' opprobrious page.
Yet may we from each distant age
Collect such records as disgrace
Both us and man's imperious race.

II. I.

By love distracted, from thy native strand, Thou 'twixt the ocean's clashing rocks didst sail But now, loathed inmate of a foreign land, Thy treacherous husband's loss art doomed to wail.

O hapless matron, overwhelmed with woe, From this unpitying realm dishonoured must thou go. II. 2.

No longer sacred oaths their credit bear, And virtuous shame hath left the Grecian plain, She mounts to Heaven, and breathes a purer air. For thee doth no paternal house remain The sheltering haven from affliction's tides; Over these hostile roofs a mightier queen presides.

Jason, Medea, Chorus.

Jason. Not now for the first time, but oft, full oft Have I observed that anger is a pest The most unruly. For when in this land, These mansions, you in peace might have abode, By patiently submitting to the will Of your superiors, you, for empty words, Are doomed to exile. Not that I regard Your calling Jason with incessant rage The worst of men; but for those bitter taunts With which you have reviled a mighty king, Too mild a penalty may you esteem Such banishment. I still have soothed the wrath Of the offended monarch, still have wished That you might here continue; but no bounds Your folly knows, nor can that tongue e'er cease To utter menaces against your lords; Hence from these regions justly are you doomed To be cast forth. But with unwearied love Attentive to your interest am I come, Lest with your children you by cruel want Should be encompassed; exile with it brings Full many evils. Me, though you abhor, To you I harbour no unfriendly thought.

To you I harbour no unfriendly thought.

Medea. Thou worst of villains (for this bitter charge
Against thy abject cowardice my tongue
May justly urge), com'st thou to me, O wretch,
Who to the gods art odious, and to me
And all the human race? It is no proof
Of courage, or of steadfastness, to face
Thy injured friends, but impudence, the worst
Of all diseases. Yet hast thou done well
In coming: I by uttering the reproaches

Which thou deservest shall ease my burdened soul, And thou wilt grieve to hear them. With th' events Which happened first will I begin my charge. Each Grecian chief who in the Argo sailed Knows how from death I saved thee, when to yoke The raging bulls whose nostrils poured forth flames, And sow the baleful harvest, thou wert sent: Then having slain the dragon, who preserved With many a scaly fold the golden fleece, Nor ever closed in sleep his watchful eyes, I caused the morn with its auspicious beams To shine on thy deliverance; but, my sire And native land betraying, came with thee To Pelion, and Iolchos' gates: for love Prevailed o'er reason. Pelias next I slew— Most wretched death—by his own daughters' hands, And thus delivered thee from all thy fears. Yet though to me, O most ungrateful man, Thus much indebted, hast thou proved a traitor, And to the arms of this new consort fled. Although a rising progeny is thine. Hadst thou been childless, 'twere a venial fault In thee to court another for thy bride. But vanished is the faith which oaths erst bore. Nor can I judge whether thou think'st the gods Who ruled the world have lost their ancient power Or that fresh laws at present are in force Among mankind, because thou to thyself Art conscious, thou thy plighted faith has broken. O my right hand, which thou didst oft embrace, Oft to these knees a suppliant cling! How vainly Did I my virgin purity yield up To a perfidious husband, led astray By flattering hopes! Yet I to thee will speak As if thou wert a friend, and I expected From thee some mighty favour to obtain: Yet thou, if strictly questioned, must appear More odious. Whither shall I turn me now? To those deserted mansions of my father, Which, with my country, I to thee betrayed, And hither came; or to the wretched daughters Of Pelias? They forsooth, whose sire I slew,

Beneath their roofs with kindness would receive me. 'Tis even thus: by those of my own house Am I detested, and, to serve thy cause, Those very friends, whom least of all I ought To have unkindly treated, have I made My enemies. But eager to repay Such favours, 'mongst unnumbered Grecian dames, On me superior bliss hast thou bestowed, And I, unhappy woman, find in thee A husband who deserves to be admired For his fidelity. But from this realm When I am exiled, and by every friend Deserted, with my children left forlorn, A glorious triumph, in thy bridal hour, To thee will it afford, if those thy sons, And I who saved thee, should like vagrants roam. Wherefore, O Jove, didst thou instruct mankind How to distinguish by undoubted marks on kind Counterfeit gold, yet in the front of vice Impress no brand to show the tainted heart?

Chorus. How sharp their wrath, how hard to be appeared. When friends with friends begin the cruel strife.

Jason. I ought not to be rash, it seems, in speech, But like the skilful pilot, who, with sails Scarce half unfurled, his bark more surely guides, Escape, O woman, your ungoverned tongue. Since you the benefits on me conferred Exaggerate in so proud a strain, I deem That I to Venus only, and no god Or man beside, my prosperous voyage owe. Although a wondrous subtlety of soul To you belong, 'twere an invidious speech For me to make should I relate how Love By his inevitable shafts constrained you To save my life. I will not therefore state This argument too nicely, but allow, As you did aid me, it was kindly done. But by preserving me have you gained more Than you bestowed, as I shall prove: and first, Transplanted from barbaric shores, you dwell In Grecian regions, and have bere been taught To act as justice and the laws ordain,

Nor follow the caprice of brutal strength. By all the Greeks your wisdom is perceived, And you acquire renown; but had you still Inhabited that distant spot of earth, You never had been named. I would not wish For mansions heaped with gold, or to exceed The sweetest notes of Orpheus' magic lyre, Were those unfading wreaths which fame bestows From me withheld by fortune. I thus far On my own labours only have discoursed. For you this odious strife of words began. But in espousing Creon's royal daughter, With which you have reproached me, I will prove That I in acting thus am wise and chaste, That I to you have been the best of friends, And to our children. But make no reply. Since hither from Iolchos' land I came, Accompanied by many woes, and such As could not be avoided, what device More advantageous could an exile frame Than wedding the king's daughter? Not through hate

To you, which you reproach me with, not smitten With love for a new consort, or a wish The number of my children to augment: For those we have already might suffice, And I complain not. But to me it seemed Of great importance that we both might live As suits our rank, nor suffer abject need, Well knowing that each friend avoids the poor. I also wished to educate our sons In such a manner as befits my race And with their noble brothers yet unborn, Make them one family, that thus, my house Cementing, I might prosper. In some measure Is it your interest too that by my bride I should have sons, and me it much imports, By future children, to provide for those Who are in being. Have I judged amiss? You would not censure me, unless your soul Were by a rival stung. But your whole sex Hath these ideas; if in marriage blest

Ye deem nought wanting, but if some reverse Of fortune e'er betide the nuptial couch, All that was good and lovely ye abhor.

Far better were it for the human race Had children been produced by other means, No females e'er existing: hence might man Exempt from every evil have remained.

Chorus. Thy words hast thou with specious art adorned,
Yet thou to me (it is against my will
That I such language hold), O Jason, seem'st
Not to have acted justly in betraying
Thy consort.

From the many I dissent Medea. In many points: for, in my judgment, he Who tramples on the laws, but can express His thoughts with plausibility, deserves Severest punishment: for that injustice On which he glories, with his artful tongue, That he a fair appearance can bestow, He dares to practise, nor is truly wise. No longer then this specious language hold To me, who by one word can strike thee dumb. Hadst thou not acted with a base design, It was thy duty first to have prevailed On me to give consent, ere these espousals Thou hadst contracted, nor kept such design A secret from thy friends.

Jason. You would have served My cause most gloriously, had I disclosed To you my purposed nuptials, when the rage Of that proud heart still unsubdued remains.

Medea. Thy real motive was not what thou sayst,
But a Barbarian wife, in thy old age,
Might have appeared to tarnish thy renown.

Jason. Be well assured, love urged me not to take
The daughter of the monarch to my bed.
But 'twas my wish to save you from distress,
As I already have declared, and raise
Some royal brothers to our former sons,
Strengthening with fresh supports our shattered

Medea. May that prosperity which brings remorse

Be never mine, nor riches such as sting The soul with anguish.

Jason. Are you not aware

You soon will change your mind and grow more wise?

Forbear to spurn the blessings you possess, Nor droop beneath imaginary woes, When you are happy.

Medea. Scoff at my distress,
For thou hast an asylum to receive thee:
But from this land am I constrained to roam
A lonely exile.

Tason. This was your own choice:

Accuse none else.

Medea. What have I done—betrayed

My plighted faith and sought a foreign bed?

Jason. You uttered impious curses 'gainst the king. Medea. I also in thy mansions am accursed.

Medea. I also in thy mansions am accursed.

Jason. With you I on these subjects will contend
No longer. But speak freely, what relief,
Or for the children or your exiled state,
You from my prosperous fortunes would receive:
For with a liberal hand am I inclined
My bounties to confer, and hence despatch
Such tokens, as to hospitable kindness
Will recommend you. Woman, to refuse
These offers were mere folly; from your soul
Banish resentment, and no trifling gain
Will hence ensue.

Medea. No use I of thy friends

Will make, nor aught accept; thy presents spare,

For nothing which the wicked man can give

Proves beneficial.

Jason. I invoke the gods
To witness that I gladly would supply
You and your children with whate'er ye need:
But you these favours loathe, and with disdain
Repel your friends: hence an increase of woe
Shall be your lot.

Medea. Be gone; for thou, with love
For thy young bride inflamed, too long remain'st
Without the palace. Wed her; though perhaps

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(Yet with submission to the righteous gods, This I announce) such marriage thou mayst rue.

[Exit JASON.

CHORUS.

ODE.

I. I.

Th' immoderate loves in their career,
Nor glory nor esteem attends,
But when the Cyprian queen descends
Benignant from her starry sphere,
No goddess can more justly claim
From man the grateful prayer.
Thy wrath, O Venus, still forbear,
Nor at my tender bosom aim

That venomed arrow, ever wont t' inspire Winged from thy golden bow, the pangs of keen desire.

I. 2.

May I in modesty delight,
Best present which the gods can give,
Nor torn by jarring passions live
A prey to wrath and cankered spite,
Still envious of a rival's charms,
Nor rouse the endless strife

While on my soul another wife Impresses vehement alarms:

On us, dread queen, thy mildest influence shed, Thou who discern'st each crime that stains the nuptial bed.

II. I.

My native land, and dearest home!
May I ne'er know an exiled state,
Nor be it ever my sad fate
While from thy well-known bourn I roam,
My hopeless anguish to bemoan.
Rather let death, let death
Take at that hour my forfeit breath,
For surely never was there known

On earth a curse so great as to exceed, From his loved country torn, the wretched exile's need. II. 2.

These eyes attest thy piteous tale,
Which not from fame alone we know;
But, O thou royal dame, thy woe
No generous city doth bewail,
Nor one among thy former friends.
Abhorred by Heaven and earth,
Perish the wretch devoid of worth,
Engrossed by mean and selfish ends,
Whose heart expands not those he loved to aid;
Never may I lament attachments thus repaid.

ÆGEUS, MEDEA, CHORUS.

Ageus. Medea, hail! for no man can devise
Terms more auspicious to accost his friends.

Medea. And you, O son of wise Pandion, hail
Illustrious Ægeus. But to these domains
Whence came you?

Ageus. From Apollo's ancient shrine.

Medea. But to that centre of the world, whence sounds

Prophetic issue, why did you repair?

Ægeus. To question by what means I may obtain A race of children.

Medea. By the gods, inform me,
Are you still doomed to drag a childless life?

Ægeus. Such is the influence of some adverse demon-

Medea. Have you a wife, or did you never try
The nuptial voke?

Ageus. With wedlock's sacred bonds

I am not unacquainted.

Medea.
On the subject
Of children, what did Phœbus say?

Focus. His words

Were such as mortals cannot comprehend.

Medea. Am I allowed to know the god's reply?

Ægeus. Thou surely art: such mystery to expound

There needs the help of thy sagacious soul.

Medea. Inform me what the oracle pronounced,

If I may hear it.

Ageus. "The projecting foot,
Thou, of the vessel must not dare to loose"—

Medea. Till you do what, or to what region come?

Ægeus. "Till thou return to thy paternal lares."

Medea. But what are you in need of, that you steer Your bark to Corinth's shores?

A king, whose name
Is Pittheus, o'er Trœzene's realm presides.

Medea. That most religious man, they say, is son Of Pelops.

Egeus. I with him would fain discuss
The god's prophetic voice.

Medea. For he is wise,

And in this science long hath been expert.

Egeus. Dearest to me of those with whom I formed

A league of friendship in the embattled field.

Medea. But, O may you be happy, and obtain All that you wish for.

Regeus. Why those downcast eyes,
That wasted form?

Medea. O Ægeus, he I wedded

To me hath proved of all mankind most base.

Egeus. What mean'st thou? In plain terms thy grief declare.

Medea. Jason hath wronged me, though without a cause. Egeus. Be more explicit, what injurious treatment

Egeus. Be more explicit, what injurious treatments Complain'st thou of?

Medea. To me hath he preferred Another wife, the mistress of this house.

Ægeus. Dared he to act so basely?

Medea. Be assured
That I, whom erst he loved, am now forsaken.

Egeus. What amorous passion triumphs o'er his soul?

Or doth he loathe thy bed?

Medea. 'Tis mighty love,

That to his first attachment makes him false.

Ægeus. Let him depart then, if he be so void Of honour as thou sayst.

Medea. He sought to form Alliance with a monarch.

Ægeus. Who bestows
On him a royal bride? Conclude thy tale.

Medea. Creon, the ruler of this land.

Ægeus. Thy sorrows

Are then excusable.

Medea.

I am undone,

And banished hence.

Ægeus. By whom? There's not a word Thou utter'st but unfolds fresh scenes of woe.

Medea. Me from this realm to exile Creon drives.

Egeus. Doth Jason suffer this? I cannot praise

Such conduct.

Medea. Not in words: though he submits
Without reluctance. But I by that beard,
And by those knees, a wretched suppliant, crave
Your pity; see me not cast forth forlorn,
But to your realms and to your social hearth
Receive me as a guest; so may your desire
For children be accomplished by the gods,
And happiness your close of life attend.
But how important a discovery Fortune
To you here makes you are not yet apprised:
For destitute of heirs will I permit you
No longer to remain, but through my aid
Shall you have sons, such potent drugs I know.

Ægeus. Various inducements urge me to comply With this request, O woman; first an awe For the immortal gods, and then the hope That I the promised issue shall obtain. On what my senses scarce can comprehend I will rely. O that thy arts may prove Effectual! Thee, if haply thou arriv'st In my domain, with hospitable rites Shall it be my endeavour to receive, As justice dictates: but to thee, thus much It previously behaves me to announce: I will not take thee with me from this realm; But to my house if of thyself thou come Thou a secure asylum there shalt find, Nor will I yield thee up to any foe. But hence without my aid must thou depart, For I, from those who in this neighbouring land Of Corinth entertain me as their guest, Wish to incur no censure.

Medea. Your commands
Shall be obeyed: but would you plight your
faith

That you this promise will to me perform, A noble friend in you shall I have found.

Ægeus. Believ'st thou not? Whence rise these anxious

Medea. In you I trust; though Pelias' hostile race
And Creon's hate pursue me: but, if bound
By the firm sanction of a solemn oath,
You will not suffer them with brutal force
To drag me from your realm, but having entered
Into such compact, and by every god
Sworn to protect me, still remain a friend,
Nor hearken to their embassies. My fortune
Is in its wane, but wealth to them belongs,

Ægeus. In these words
Hast thou expressed great forethought: but if

thus

Thou art disposed to act, I my consent Will not refuse; for I shall be more safe If to thy foes some plausible excuse I can allege, and thee more firmly stablish. But say thou first what gods I shall invoke.

Medea. Swear by the earth on which we tread, the sun My grandsire, and by all the race of gods.

Ægeus. What action, or to do or to forbear?

And an imperial mansion.

Medea. That from your land you never will expel, Nor while you live consent that any foe Shall tear me thence.

And every god I swear, I to the terms

Thou hast proposed will steadfastly adhere.

Medea. This may suffice. But what if you infringe
Your oath, what punishment will you endure?

Egeus. Each curse that can befall the impious man.

Medea. Depart, and prosper: all things now advance
In their right track, and with the utmost speed
I to your city will direct my course,
When I have executed those designs
I meditate, and compassed what I wish.

[Exit ÆGEUS.

Chorus. But thee, O king, may Maia's wingéd son Lead to thy Athens; there mayst thou attain All that thy soul desires, for thou to me.

O Ægeus, seem'st most generous. Medea. Awful Jove,

The whale was

Thou too, O Justice, who art ever joined With thundering Jove, and bright Hyperion's beams,

You I invoke. Now, O my friends, o'er those I hate shall we prevail: 'tis the career Of victory that we tread, and I at length Have hopes the strictest vengeance on my foes To execute: for where we most in need Of a protector stood, appeared this stranger, The haven of my counsels: we shall fix Our cables to this poop, soon as we reach That hallowed city where Minerva reigns. But now to you the whole of my designs Will I relate; look not for such a tale As yields delight: some servant will I send An interview with Jason to request, And on his coming, in the softest words Address him; say these matters are well pleasing To me, and in the strongest terms applaud That marriage with the daughter of the king, Which now the traitor celebrates; then add, "'Tis for our mutual good, 'tis rightly done." But the request which I intend to make Is that he here will let my children stay;

Not that I mean to leave them thus behind,

Exposed to insults in a hostile realm

From those I hate; but that my arts may slay

The royal maid: with presents in their hands,

A vesture finely wrought and golden crown,

Will I despatch them; these they to the bride

Shall bear, that she their exile may reverse: Will I despatch them; these they to the bride If these destructive ornaments she take And put them on, both she, and every one Who touches her, shall miserably perish—

My presents with such drugs I will anoint. Far as to this relates, here ends my speech. But I with anguish think upon a deed Of more than common horror, which remains By me to be accomplished: for my sons

Am I resolved to slay, them from this arm
Shall no man rescue. When I thus have
filled

With dire confusion Jason's wretched house, I, from this land, yet reeking with the gore Of my dear sons, will fly, and having dared A deed most impious. For the scornful taunts Of those we hate are not to be endured, Happen what may. Can life be any gain To me who have no country left, no home, No place of refuge? Greatly did I err When I forsook the mansions of my sire, Persuaded by the flattery of that Greek Whom I will punish, if just Heaven permit. For he shall not again behold the children I bore him while yet living. From his bride Nor shall there issue any second race, Since that vile woman by my baleful drugs Vilely to perish have the Fates ordained. None shall think lightly of me, as if weak, Of courage void, or with a soul too tame, But formed by Heaven in a far different mould, The terror of my foes, and to my friends Benignant: for most glorious are the lives Of those who act with such determined zeal.

Chorus. Since thy design thus freely thou to us
Communicat'st, I, through a wish to serve
Thy interests, and a reverence for those laws
Which all mankind hold sacred, from thy purpose

Exhort thee to desist.

Medea. This cannot be:

Yet I from you, because ye have not felt
Distress like mine, such language can excuse.

Chorus. Thy guiltless children wilt thou dare to slay?

Medea. My husband hence more deeply shall I wound.

Chorus. But thou wilt of all women be most wretched.

Medea. No matter: all the counsels ye can give
Are now superfluous. But this instant go
And Jason hither bring; for on your faith,
In all things I depend; nor these resolves
Will you divulge if you your mistress love,
And feel a woman's interest in my wrongs.

CHORUS.

Heroes of Erectheus' race To the gods who owe your birth, And in a long succession trace Your sacred origin from earth, Who on wisdom's fruit regale, Purest breezes still inhale, And behold skies ever bright,

Wandering through those haunted glades Where fame relates that the Pierian maids, Soothing the soul of man with chaste delight, Taught Harmony to breathe her first enchanting tale.

I. 2.

From Cephisus' amber tide, At the Cyprian queen's command, As sing the Muses, are supplied To refresh the thirsty land, Fragrant gales of temperate air; While around her auburn hair. In a vivid chaplet twined Never-fading roses bloom

And scent the champaign with their rich perfume, Love comes in unison with wisdom joined, Each virtue thrives if Beauty lend her fostering care.

II. I.

For its holy streams renowned Can that city, can that state Where friendship's generous train are found Shelter thee from public hate, When, defiled with horrid guilt, Thou thy children's blood hast spilt? Think on this atrocious deed Ere the dagger aim the blow:

Around thy knees our suppliant arms we throw; O doom not, doom them not to bleed.

II. 2.

How can thy relentless heart All humanity disclaim, Thy lifted arm perform its part? Lost to a sense of honest shame, Canst thou take their lives away And these guiltless children slay? Soon as thou thy sons shalt view, How wilt thou the tear restrain,

Or with their blood thy ruthless hands distain, When prostrate they for mercy sue?

Jason, Medea, Chorus.

Jason, I at your call am come; for though such hate To me you bear, you shall not be denied In this request; but let me hear what else You would solicit.

Jason, I of thee Medea. Crave pardon for the hasty words I spoke; Since just it were that thou shouldst bear my wrath, When by such mutual proofs of love our union Hath been cemented. For I reasoned thus, And in these terms reproached myself: "O wretch, Wretch that I am, what madness fires my breast? Or why 'gainst those who counsel me aright Such fierce resentment harbour? What just cause Have I to hate the rulers of this land. My husband too, who acts but for my good In his espousals with the royal maid,

That to my sons he hence may add a race Of noble brothers? Shall not I appease The tempest of my soul? Why, when the gods Confer their choicest blessings, should I grieve? Have not I helpless children? Well I know That we are banished from Thessalia's realm And left without a friend." When I these thought

Maturely had revolved, I saw how great My folly and how groundless was my wrath. Now therefore I commend, now deem thee wise In forming this connection for my sake:

But I was void of wisdom, or had borne

A part in these designs, the genial bed Obsequiously attended, and with joy Performed each menial office for the bride. I will not speak in too reproachful terms Of my own sex; but we, weak women, are What nature formed us; therefore our defects Thou must not imitate, nor yet return Folly for folly. I submit and own My judgment was erroneous, but at length Have I formed better counsels. O my sons, Come hither, leave the palace, from those doors Advance, and in a soft persuasive strain With me unite your father to accost, Forget past enmity, and to your friends Be reconciled, for 'twixt us is a league Of peace established, and my wrath subsides. [The Sons of Jason and Medea enter.

Take hold of his right hand. Ah me, how great
Are my afflictions oft as I revolve
A deed of darkness in my labouring soul!
How long, alas! my sons, are ye ordained
To live, how long to stretch forth those dear arms?
Wretch that I am! how much am I disposed
To weep! how subject to each fresh alarm!
For I at length desisting from that strife,
Which with your sire I rashly did maintain,
Feel gushing tears bedew my tender cheek.

Chorus. Fresh tears too from these eyes have forced their way;
And may no greater ill than that which now

We suffer, overtake us!

I applaud
Your present conduct, and your former rage
Condemn not; for 'tis natural that the race
Of women should be angry when their lord
For a new consort trucks them. But your heart
Is for the better changed, and you, though late,
At length acknowledge the resistless power
Of reason; this is acting like a dame
Endued with prudence. But for you, my sons,
Abundant safety your considerate sire
Hath with the favour of the gods procured,
For ye, I trust, shall with my future race

Bear the first rank in this Corinthian realm,
Advance to full maturity; the rest,
Aided by each benignant god, your father
Shall soon accomplish. Virtuously trained up
May I behold you at a riper age
Obtain pre-eminence o'er those I hate.
But, ha! Why with fresh tears do you thus keep
Those eyelids moist? From your averted cheeks
Why is the colour fled, or why these words
Receive you not with a complacent ear?

Medea. Nothing: my thoughts were busied for these children.

Jason. Be of good courage, and for them depend On my protecting care.

Medea. I will obey,

Nor disbelieve the promise thou hast made:
But woman, ever frail, is prone to shed
Involuntary tears.

Jason. But why bewail With such deep groans these children?

Medea. Them I bore

And that our sons might live, while to the gods Thou didst address thy vows, a pitying thought Entered my soul; 'twas whether this could be. But of th' affairs on which thou com'st to hold This conference with me, have I told a part Already, and to thee will now disclose The sequel: since the rulers of this land Resolve to banish me, as well I know That it were best for me to give no umbrage, Or to the king of Corinth, or to thee, By dwelling here: because I to this house Seem to bear enmity, from these domains Will I depart: but urge thy suit to Creon, That under thy paternal care our sons May be trained up, nor from this realm expelled. Though doubtful of success. I yet am bound

Jason. Though doubtful of success, I yet am bound To make th' attempt.

Medea. Thou rather shouldst enjoin
Thy bride her royal father to entreat,
That he these children's exile may reverse.

Jason. With pleasure; and I doubt not but on her,

If like her sex humane, I shall prevail.

Medea. To aid thee in this difficult emprise Shall be my care, for I to her will send Gifts that I know in beauty far exceed The gorgeous works of man; a tissued vest And golden crown the children shall present, But with the utmost speed these ornaments One of thy menial train must hither bring, For not with one, but with ten thousand blessings Shall she be gratified; thee, best of men, Obtaining for the partner of her bed, And in possession of those splendid robes Which erst the sun my grandsire did bestow On his descendants: take them in your hands, My children, to the happy royal bride Instantly bear them, and in dower bestow, For such a gift as ought not to be scorned Shall she receive.

Jason.

Why rashly part with these? Of tissued robes or gold can you suppose The palace destitute? These trappings keep, Nor to another give: for if the dame On me place real value, well I know My love she to all treasures will prefer.

Medea. Speak not so hastily: the gods themselves By gifts are swayed, as fame relates; and gold Hath a far greater influence o'er the souls Of mortals than the most persuasive words: With fortune, the propitious heavens conspire To add fresh glories to thy youthful bride, All here submits to her despotic sway. But I my children's exile would redeem, Though at the cost of life, not gold alone. But these adjacent mansions of the king Soon as ye enter, O ye little ones, Your sire's new consort and my queen entreat That ye may not be banished from this land: At the same time these ornaments present, For most important is it that these gifts With her own hands the royal dame receive. Go forth, delay not, and, if ye succeed, Your mother with the welcome tidings greet. Exeunt JASON and Sons.

CHORUS

It S The mon I. I.

Now from my soul each hope is fled,
I deem those hapless children dead,
They rush to meet the wound:
Mistrustful of no latent pest
Th' exulting bride will seize the gorgeous vest,
Her auburn tresses crowned
By baleful Pluto, shall she stand,
And take the presents with an eager hand.

I. 2.

The splendid robe of thousand dyes
Will fascinate her raptured eyes,
And tempt her till she wear
The golden diadem, arrayed
To meet her bridegroom in th' infernal shade
She thus into the snare
Of death shall be surprised by fate,
Nor 'scape remorseless Atè's direful hate.

II. I.

But as for thee whose nuptials bring
The proud alliance of a king,
'Midst dangers unespied
Thou madly rushing, aid'st the blow
Ordained by Heaven to lay thy children low,
And thy lamented bride:
O man, how little dost thou know
That o'er thy head impends severest woe!

II. 2.

Thy anguish I no less bemoan,
No less for thee, O mother, groan,
Bent on a horrid deed,
Thy children who resolv'st to slay,
Nor fear'st to take their guiltless lives away.
Those innocents must bleed,
Because, disdainful of thy charms,
The husband flies to a new consort's arms.

Medea

ATTENDANT, SONS, MEDEA, CHORUS.

Attend. Your sons, my honoured mistress, are set free From banishment; in her own hands those gifts With courtesy the royal bride received; Hence have your sons obtained their peace.

Medea. No matter

Attend. Why stand you in confusion, when befriended By prosperous fortune?

Medea. Ah!

Attend. This harsh reception

Accords not with the tidings which I bring.

Medea. Alas! and yet again I say, alas!

Attend. Have I related with unconscious tongue Some great calamity, by the fond hope Of bearing glad intelligence misled?

Medea. For having told what thou hast told, no blame

To thee do I impute.

Attend. But on the ground

Why fix those eyes, and shed abundant tears?

Medea. Necessity constrains me: for the gods
Of Erebus and I in evil hour
Our baleful machinations have devised.

Attend. Be of good cheer; for in your children still

Are you successful.

Medea. 'Midst the realms of night
Others I first will plunge. Ah, wretched me!

Attend. Not you alone are from your children torn,
Mortal you are, and therefore must endure
Calamity with patience.

Medea. I these counsels

Will practise: but go thou into the palace, And for the children whatsoe'er to-day

Is requisite, make ready. [Exit ATTENDANT,

O my sons! My sons! ye have a city and a house

Where, leaving hapless me behind, without A mother ye for ever shall reside.

But I to other realms an exile go, Ere any help from you I could derive, Or see you blest; the hymeneal pomp,

The bride, the genial couch, for you adorn,

And in these hands the kindled torch sustain. How wretched am I through my own perverseness! You, O my sons, I then in vain have nurtured, In vain have toiled, and, wasted with fatigue, Suffered the pregnant matron's grievous throes. On you, in my afflictions, many hopes I founded erst: that ye with pious care Would foster my old age, and on the bier Extend me after death-much envied lot Of mortals; but these pleasing anxious thoughts Are vanished now; for, losing you, a life Of bitterness and anguish shall I lead. But as for you, my sons, with those dear eyes Fated no more your mother to behold, Hence are ye hastening to a world unknown. Why do ye gaze on me with such a look Of tenderness, or wherefore smile? for these Are your last smiles. Ah wretched, wretched me! What shall I do? My resolution fails. Sparkling with joy now I their looks have seen, My friends, I can no more. To those past schemes I bid adieu, and with me from this land My children will convey. Why should I cause A twofold portion of distress to fall On my own head, that I may grieve the sire By punishing his sons? This shall not be: Such counsels I dismiss. But in my purpose What means this change? Can I prefer derision. And with impunity permit the foe To 'scape? My utmost courage I must rouse: For the suggestion of these tender thoughts Proceeds from an enervate heart. My sons. Enter the regal mansion. Exeunt Sons.

As for those
Who deem that to be present were unholy
While I the destined victims offer up,
Let them see to it. This uplifted arm
Shall never shrink. Alas! alas! my soul
Commit not such a deed. Unhappy woman,
Desist and spare thy children; we will live
Together, they in foreign realms shall cheer
Thy exile. No, by those avenging fiends

Who dwell with Pluto in the realms beneath, This shall not be, nor will I ever leave My sons to be insulted by their foes. They certainly must die; since then they must, I bore and I will slay them: 'tis a deed Resolved on, nor my purpose will I change. Full well I know that now the royal bride Wears on her head the magic diadem, And in the variegated robe expires: But, hurried on by fate, I tread a path Of utter wretchedness, and them will plunge Into one yet more wretched. To my sons Fain would I say: "O stretch forth your right hands Ye children, for your mother to embrace. O dearest hands, ye lips to me most dear, Engaging features and ingenuous looks, May ye be blest, but in another world; For by the treacherous conduct of your sire Are ve bereft of all this earth bestowed. Farewell, sweet kisses—tender limbs, farewell! And fragrant breath! I never more can bear To look on you, my children." My afflictions Have conquered me; I now am well aware What crimes I venture on: but rage, the cause Of woes most grievous to the human race. Over my better reason hath prevailed. Chorus. In subtle questions I full many a time Have heretofore engaged, and this great point Debated, whether woman should extend Her search into abstruse and hidden truths. But we too have a Muse, who with our sex Associates to expound the mystic lore Of wisdom, though she dwell not with us all. Yet haply a small number may be found, Among the multitude of females, dear To the celestial Muses. I maintain, They who in total inexperience live, Nor ever have been parents, are more happy Than they to whom much progeny belongs. Because the childless, having never tried

Whether more pain or pleasure from their offspring To mortals rises, 'scape unnumbered toils.

But I observe that they, whose fruitful house Is with a lovely race of infants filled, Are harassed with perpetual cares; how first To train them up in virtue, and whence leave Fit portions for their sons; but on the good Or worthless, whether they these toils bestow Remains involved in doubt. I yet must name One evil the most grievous, to which all The human race is subject; some there are Who for their sons have gained sufficient wealth, Seen them to full maturity advance, And decked with every virtue, when, by fate If thus it be ordained, comes death unseen And hurries them to Pluto's gloomy realm. Can it be any profit to the gods To heap the loss of children, that one ill Than all the rest more bitter, on mankind?

Medea. My friends, with anxious expectation long Here have I waited, from within to learn How fortune will dispose the dread event. But one of Jason's servants I behold With breathless speed advancing: his looks show That he some recent mischief would relate.

MESSENGER, MEDEA, CHORUS.

Messenger. O thou, who impiously hast wrought a deed Of horror, fly, Medea, from this land,

Fly with such haste as not to leave the bark Or from the car alight.

Medea.

What crime, to merit A banishment like this, have I committed?

Messenger. By thy enchantments is the royal maid This instant dead, and Creon, too, her sire.

Medea. Most glorious are the tidings you relate:

Henceforth shall you be numbered with my friends And benefactors.

Messenger. Ha! what words are these? Dost thou preserve thy senses yet entire? O woman, hath not madness fired thy brain? The wrongs thou to the royal house hast done Hear'st thou with joy, nor shudder'st at the tale? Medea. Somewhat I have in answer to your speech:
But be not too precipitate, my friend;
Inform me how they died, for twofold joy
Wilt thou afford, if wretchedly they perished.

Messenger. When with their father thy two sons arrived And went into the mansion of the bride. We servants, who had shared thy griefs, rejoiced; For a loud rumour instantly prevailed That all past strife betwixt thy lord and thee Was reconciled. Some kissed the children's hands. And some their auburn tresses. I with joy To those apartments where the women dwell Attended them. Our mistress, the new object Of homage such as erst to thee was paid, Ere she beheld thy sons on Jason cast A look of fond desire: but then she veiled Her eyes, and turned her pallid cheeks away Disgusted at their coming, till his voice Appeased her anger with these gentle words: "O be not thou inveterate 'gainst thy friends, But lay aside disdain, thy beauteous face Turn hither, and let amity for those Thy husband loves still warm that generous breast. Accept these gifts, and to thy father sue, That, for my sake, the exile of my sons He will remit." Soon as the princess saw Thy glittering ornaments, she could resist No longer, but to all her lord's requests Assented, and before thy sons were gone Far from the regal mansion with their sire, The vest, resplendent with a thousand dyes, Put on, and o'er her loosely floating hair Placing the golden crown, before the mirror Her tresses braided, and with smiles surveyed Th' inanimated semblance of her charms: Then rising from her seat across the palace Walked with a delicate and graceful step, In the rich gifts exulting, and oft turned Enraptured eyes on her own stately neck, Reflected to her view: but now a scene Of horror followed; her complexion changed, And she reeled backward, trembling every limb;

Scarce did her chair receive her as she sunk In time to save her falling to the ground. One of her menial train, an aged dame, Possest with an idea that the wrath Either of Pan or of some god unknown Her mistress had invaded, in shrill tone Poured forth a vow to Heaven, till from her mouth She saw foam issue, in their sockets roll Her wildly glaring eyeballs, and the blood Leave her whole frame; a shriek, that differed far From her first plaints, then gave she. In an instant This to her father's house, and that to tell The bridegroom the mischance which had befallen His consort, rushed impetuous; through the dome The frequent steps of those who to and fro Ran in confusion did resound. But soon As the fleet courser at the goal arrives, She who was silent, and had closed her eyes, Roused from her swoon, and burst forth into groans Most dreadful, for 'gainst her two evils warred: Placed on her head the golden crown poured forth A wondrous torrent of devouring flames, And the embroidered robes, thy children's gifts, Preyed on the hapless virgin's tender flesh; Covered with fire she started from her seat Shaking her hair, and from her head the crown With violence attempting to remove, But still more firmly did the heated gold Adhere, and the fanned blaze with double lustre Burst forth as she her streaming tresses shook: Subdued by fate, at length she to the ground Fell prostrate: scarce could anyone have known her Except her father; for those radiant eyes Dropped from their sockets, that majestic face Its wonted features lost, and blood with fire Ran down her head in intermingled streams, While from her bones the flesh, like weeping pitch, Melted away, through the consuming power Of those unseen enchantments; 'twas a sight Most horrible: all feared to touch the corpse, For her disastrous end had taught us caution. Meanwhile her hapless sire, who knew not aught

Of this calamity, as he with haste Entered the palace, stumbled o'er her body: Instantly shricking out, then with his arms Infolded, kissed it oft, and, "O my child, My wretched child," exclaimed; "what envious god. Author of thy dishonourable fall, Of thee bereaves an old decrepit man Whom the grave claims? With thee I wish to die, My daughter." Scarcely had the hoary father These lamentations ended; to uplift His feeble body striving, he adhered (As ivy with its pliant tendrils clings Around the laurel) to the tissued vest. Dire was the conflict; he to raise his knee From earth attempted, but his daughter's corse Still held him down, or if with greater force He dragged it onward, from his bones he tore The aged flesh: at length he sunk, and breathed In agonizing pangs his soul away: For he against such evil could bear up No longer. To each other close in death The daughter and her father lie: their fate Demands our tears. Warned by my words, with haste From this domain convey thyself, or vengeance Will overtake thee for this impious deed. Not now for the first time do I esteem Human affairs a shadow. Without fear Can I pronounce, they who appear endued With wisdom, and most plausibly trick out Specious harangues, deserve to be accounted The worst of fools. The man completely blest Exists not. Some in overflowing wealth May be more fortunate, but none are happy. This day resolved with justice to pour down

Chorus. Heaven its collected store of evil seems
This day resolved with justice to pour down
On perjured Jason. Thy untimely fate
How do we pity, O thou wretched daughter
Of Creon, who in Pluto's mansions go'st
To celebrate thy nuptial feast.

Medea. My friends,
I am resolved, as soon as I have slain

My children, from these regions to depart,

Nor through inglorious sloth will I abandon My sons to perish by detested hands; They certainly must die: since then they must, I bore and I will slay them. O my heart! Be armed with tenfold firmness. What avails it To loiter, when inevitable ills Remain to be accomplished? Take the sword, And, O my hand, on to the goal that ends Their life, nor let one intervening thought Of pity or maternal tenderness Suspend thy purpose: for this one short day Forget how fondly thou didst love thy sons, How bring them forth, and after that lament Their cruel fate: although thou art resolved To slay, yet hast thou ever held them dear. But I am of all women the most wretched.

[Exit MEDEA.

Chorus.

ODE.

I.

Earth, and thou sun, whose fervid blaze
From pole to pole illumes each distant land,
View this abandoned woman, ere she raise
Against her children's lives a ruthless hand;
For from thy race, divinely bright,

They spring, and should the sons of gods be slain
By man, 'twere dreadful. O restrain
Her fury, thou celestial source of light,
Ere she with blood pollute your regal dome,
Chased by the demons hence let this Erinnys roam.

II.

The pregnant matron's throes in vain

Hast thou endured, and borne a lovely race,
O thou, who o'er th' inhospitable main,
Where the Cyanean rocks scarce leave a space,
Thy daring voyage didst pursue.
Why, O thou wretch, thy soul doth anger rend,
Such as in murder soon must end?
They who with kindred gore are stained shall rue
Their guilt inexpiable: full well I know

The gods will on this house inflict severest woe.

Medea

ist Son [within]. Ah me! what can I do or whither fly

To 'scape a mother's arm?

and Son [within]. I cannot tell: For, O my dearest brother, we are lost.

Chorus. Heard you the children's shrieks? I (O thou dame, Whom woes and evil fortune still attend) Will rush into the regal dome, from death Resolved to snatch thy sons.

Ist Son [within]. We by the gods Conjure you to protect us in this hour Of utmost peril, for the treacherous snare Hath caught us, and we perish by the sword.

Chorus. Art thou a rock, O wretch, or steel, to slay With thine own hand that generous race of sons Whom thou didst bear? I hitherto have heard But of one woman, who in ancient days Smote her dear children, Ino, by the gods With frenzy stung, when Jove's malignant queen Distracted from her mansion drove her forth. But she, yet reeking with the impious gore Of her own progeny, into the waves Plunged headlong from the ocean's craggy beach, And shared with her two sons one common fate. Can there be deeds more horrible than these Left for succeeding ages to produce? Disastrous union with the female sex, How great a source of woes art thou to man!

JASON, CHORUS.

Jason. Ye dames who near the portals stand, is she Who hath committed these atrocious crimes, Medea, in the palace, or by flight Hath she retreated? For beneath the ground Must she conceal herself, or, borne on wings, Ascend the heights of Ether, to avoid The vengeance due for Corinth's royal house. Having destroyed the rulers of the land, Can she presume she shall escape unhurt From these abodes? But less am I concerned On her account, than for my sons; since they Whom she hath injured will on her inflict Due punishment: but hither am I come

To save my children's lives, lest on their heads. The noble Creon's kindred should retaliate. That impious murder by their mother wrought.

Chorus. Thou know'st not yet, O thou unhappy man,
What ills thou art involved in, or these words
Had not escaped thee.

Jason. Ha, what ills are these
Thou speak'st of? Would she also murder me?
Chorus. By their own mother's hand thy sons are slain.
Jason. What can you mean? How utterly, O woman,
Have you undone me!

Chorus. Be assured thy children

Are now no more.

Jason. Where was it, or within Those mansions or without, that she destroyed Our progeny?

Chorus. As soon as thou these doors
Hast oped, their weltering corses wilt thou view.

Jason. Loose the firm bars and bolts of yonder gates
With speed, ye servants, that I may behold
This scene of twofold misery, the remains
Of the deceased, and punish her who slew them.

MEDEA, in a chariot drawn by dragons, JASON, CHORUS.

Medea. With levers wherefore dost thou shake those doors
In quest of them who are no more, and me
Who dared to perpetrate the bloody deed?
Desist from such unprofitable toil:
But if there yet be aught that thou with me
Canst want, speak freely whatsoe'er thou wilt:
For with that hand me never shalt thou reach,
Such steeds the sun my grandsire gives to whirl
This chariot and protect me from my foes.

Jason. O most abandoned woman, by the gods,
By me and all the human race abhorred,
Who with the sword could pierce the sons you bore,
And ruin me, a childless wretched man,
Yet after you this impious deed have dared
To perpetrate, still view the radiant sun
And fostering earth; may vengeance overtake you!
For I that reason have regained which erst
Forsook me, when to the abodes of Greece

I from your home, from a barbarian realm, Conveyed you, to your sire a grievous bane, And the corrupt betrayer of that land Which nurtured you. Some envious god first roused Your evil genius from the shades of hell For my undoing: after you had slain Your brother at the altar, you embarked In the famed Argo. Deeds like these a life Of guilt commenced; with me in wedlock joined, You bore those sons, whom you have now destroyed Because I left your bed. No Grecian dame Would e'er have ventured on a deed so impious; Yet I to them preferred you for my bride: This was a hostile union, and to me The most destructive; for my arms received No woman, but a lioness more fell Than Tuscan Scylla. Vainly should I strive To wound you with reproaches numberless. For you are grown insensible of shame! Vile sorceress, and polluted with the blood Of your own children, perish—my hard fate While I lament, for I shall ne'er enjoy My lovely bride, nor with those sons, who owe To me their birth and nurture, ever hold Sweet converse. They, alas! can live no more, Utterly lost to their desponding sire.

Medea. Much could I say in answer to this charge,
Were not the benefits from me received,
And thy abhorred ingratitude, well known
To Jove, dread sire. Yet was it not ordained,
Scorning my bed, that thou shouldst lead a life
Of fond delight, and ridicule my griefs;
Nor that the royal virgin thou didst wed,
Or Creon, who to thee his daughter gave,
Should drive me from these regions unavenged.
A lioness then call me if thou wilt,
Or by the name of Scylla, whose abode
Was in Etrurian caverns. For thy heart,
As justice prompted, in my turn I wounded.

Jason. You grieve, and are the partner of my woes.

Medea. Be well assured I am: but what assuages

My grief is this, that thou no more canst scoff.

Jason. How vile a mother, O my sons, was yours! Medea. How did ye perish through your father's lust!

Jason. But my right hand was guiltless of their death. Medea. Not so thy cruel taunts, and that new marriage.

Tason. Was my new marriage a sufficient cause

For thee to murder them?

Canst thou suppose Medea. Such wrongs sit light upon the female breast?

Jason. On a chaste woman's; but your soul abounds With wickedness.

Thy sons are now no more, This will afflict thee.

O'er your head, alas! They now two evil geniuses impend.

Medea. The gods know who these ruthless deeds began.

Jason. They know the hateful temper of your soul.

Medea. In detestation thee I hold, and loathe Thy conversation.

Yours too I abhor; But we with ease may settle on what terms To part for ever.

Name those terms. Say how Medea. Shall I proceed? For such my ardent wish.

Jason. Let me inter the dead, and o'er them weep. Medea. Thou shalt not. For their corses with this

hand Am I resolved to bury in the grove Sacred to awful Juno, who protects The citadel of Corinth, lest their foes Insult them, and with impious rage pluck up The monumental stone. I in this realm Of Sisyphus moreover will ordain A solemn festival and mystic rites, To make a due atonement for my guilt In having slain them. To Erectheus' land I now am on my road, where I shall dwell With Ægeus, great Pandion's son; but thou Shalt vilely perish as thy crimes deserve, Beneath the shattered relics of thy bark, The Argo, crushed; such is the bitter end Of our espousals and thy faith betrayed.

Jason. May the Erinnys of our slaughtered sons,

And justice, who requites each murderous deed, Destroy you utterly!

Medea. Will any god

Or demon hear thy curses, O thou wretch, False to thy oath, and to the sacred laws Of hospitality?

Jason. Most impious woman,

Those hands yet reeking with your children's gore—

Medea. Go to the palace, and inter thy bride. Jason. Bereft of both my sons, I thither go.

Jason. Bereft of both my sons, I thither go. Medea. Not yet enough lament'st thou: to increase

Thy sorrows, mayst thou live till thou art old! Jason. Ye dearest children.

Medea. To their mother dear,

But not to thee.

Jason. Yet them have you destroyed.

Medea. That I might punish thee.

Jason. One more fond kiss On their loved lips, ah me! would I imprint.

Medea. Now wouldst thou speak to them, and in thine arms
Clasp those whom living thou didst banish hence.

Jason. Allow me, I conjure you by the gods, My children's tender bodies to embrace.

Medea. Thou shalt not: these presumptuous words in vain By thee were hazarded.

Jove, hear'st thou this,
How I with scorn am driven away, how wronged
By that detested lioness, whose fangs
Have slain her children? Yet shall my loud plaints,
While here I fix my seat, if 'tis allowed,
And this be possible, call down the gods
To witness that you hinder me from touching
My murdered sons, and paying the deceased
Funereal honours. Would to Heaven I ne'er
Had seen them born to perish by your hand!

Chorus. Throned on Olympus, with his sovereign nod,
Jove unexpectedly performs the schemes
Divine foreknowledge planned; our firmest hopes
Oft fail us: but the god still finds the means
Of compassing what man could ne'er have looked for;
And thus doth this important business end.

HIPPOLYTUS

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

VENUS.
HIPPOLYTUS.
ATTENDANTS OF HIPPOLYTUS.
OFFICER BELONGING TO THE
PALACE.
CHORUS OF TRŒZENIAN DAMES.

) w -

Nurse.
Phædra.
Theseus.
Messengers.
Diana.

Scene. - BEFORE PITTHEUS' PALACE AT TRŒZENE.

VENUS.

My empire man confesses, and the name Of Venus echoes through heaven's wide expanse. Among all those who on the distant coast Of ocean dwell, and earth's remotest bounds Old Atlas' station who upholds the skies, Beholding the resplendent solar beams; On them who to my power due homage pay Great honours I bestow, and to the dust Humble each proud contemner. E'en the race Of happy deities with pleasure view The reverence mortals yield them. Of these words Ere long will I display the truth: that son Of Theseus and the Amazonian dame, Hippolytus, by holy Pittheus taught, E'en he alone among all those who dwell Here in Trœzene, of th' immortal powers Styles me the weakest, loathes the genial bed, Nor to the sacred nuptial yoke will bow: Apollo's sister, Dian, sprung from Jove, He worships, her the greatest he esteems Of all the gods, and ever in her groves A favoured comrade of the virgin dwells, With his swift hounds the flying beasts of prey Expelling from their haunts, and aims at more Than human nature reaches. Him in this I envy not: why should I? Yet shall vengeance This day o'ertake the miscreant: I have forged Each implement already, and there needs But little labour to effect his doom. For erst, on his arrival from the house

Of Pittheus, in Pandion's land, to view The mystic rites, and in those mystic rites To be initiated, his father's wife, Illustrious Phædra, saw the prince, her heart At my behest love's dire contagion seized: And ere she came to this Træzenian coast, She, where Minerva's rock o'erlooks this land, To Venus reared a temple, for the youth Who in a foreign region dwelt, engrossed By amorous frenzy, and to future times Resolved this lasting monumental pile Of her unhappy passion to bequeath. But from Cecropia's realm since Theseus fled To expiate his pollution, with the blood Of Pallas' sons distained, and with his queen Sailed for this coast, to voluntary exile Submitting for one year, the wretched Phædra, Groaning and deeply smitten by the stings Of love, hath pined in silence, nor perceives One of her menial train whence this disease Invaded her. Yet of its full effect Must not her amorous malady thus fail: For I to Theseus am resolved to show The truth, no longer shall it rest concealed: Then will the father with his curses slay My youthful foe: for the reward on Theseus Conferred by Neptune, ruler of the waves, Was this: that thrice he to that god might sue For any gift, nor should he sue in vain. Phædra is noble, yet she too shall perish, For I of such importance shall not hold Her ruin as to spare those foes, on whom I the severest vengeance will inflict, That I may reassert my injured fame. But hence must I retreat: for I behold Hippolytus, this son of Theseus, comes, Returning from the labours of the chase: A numerous band of servants, on their prince Attending, in the clamorous song unite To celebrate Diana: for he knows not That hell hath oped its gates, and he is doomed After this day to view the sun no more. [Exit VENUS.

HIPPOLYTUS, ATTENDANTS.

Hippolytus. Come on, my friends, attune your lays
To resound Diana's praise,
From the radiant fields of air
She listens to her votaries' prayer.

Attend.

She listens to her votaries' prayer.

Awful queen enthroned above,
Hail thou progeny of Jove,
Virgin goddess, whom of yore
Latona to the Thunderer bore,
Thy matchless beauties far outshine
Each of those lovely maids divine,
Who fill with their harmonious choir
The domes of Heaven's immortal sire.
Hail, O thou whose charms excel
All nymphs that on Olympus dwell.

Hippolytus. To deck thee, I this wreath, O goddess, bear, Cropt from you mead, o'er which no swain his flock For pasture drives, nor hath the mower's steel Despoiled its virgin herbage; 'midst each flower, Which spring profusely scatters, there the bee Roams unmolested, and religious awe Waters the champaign with abundant springs: They who owe nought to learning, but have gained From nature wisdom such as never fails In their whole conduct, are by Heaven allowed To cull these sweets, not so the wretch profane. Vouchsafe, O dearest goddess, to receive This braided fillet for thy golden hair, From me a pious votary, who alone Of all mankind am for thy worship meet, For I with thee reside, with the converse, Hearing thy voice indeed, though I thy face Have never seen. My life as it began May I with spotless purity conclude!

OFFICER, HIPPOLYTUS.

Officer. My royal master (for the gods alone
Challenge the name of lord), will you receive
A servant's good advice?

Hippolytus. With joy; else void Of wisdom I to thee might justly seem.

The law!

Officer. Know you the law prescribed to man? Hippolytus.

I cannot guess the purport of thy question.

Officer. To loathe that pride which studies not to please. Hippolytus. Right: for what haughty man is not abhorred? Officer. Doth then an affable demeanour tend

To make us popular?

Hippolytus. This much avails,

And teaches us with ease to gain renown.

Officer. But think'st thou that among celestial powers

It bears an equal influence?

Hippolytus. Since the laws
By which we mortals act from Heaven derive

Their origin.

Officer. Why, then, an awful goddess

Neglect you to invoke?

Hippolytus. Whom? Yet beware,

Lest thy tongue utter some imprudent word.

Officer. This Venus who is stationed o'er your gate,

Hippolytus. Still chaste I at a distance her salute.

Officer. By mortals deemed illustrious she exacts

Your worship.

Hippolytus. We select this god, that friend,
As suits our various tempers.

Were you wise,

Wise as you ought, you might be truly happy.

Hippolytus. I am not pleased with any god whose rites

Demand nocturnal secrecy.

Officer. My son,

We ought to reverence the immortal powers. Hippolytus. Entering the palace, O my friends, prepare

The viands, after a fatiguing chase
Delicious is the banquet: tend my steeds,
That, when I have refreshed myself with food,
Them I with more convenience to the car
May yoke and exercise: but as for this
Thy Cyprian queen, to her I bid adieu.

[Exeunt HIPPOLYTUS and ATTENDANTS. Officer. Meantime (for the example of young men

Must not be imitated), prompt to think,
And hold such language as a servant ought,
Before thy image I devoutly bend,

O sovereign Venus, thee doth it behove
To pardon the rash boy who, flushed with pride,
Speaks foolishly: seem thou as if his words
Had never reached thine ear: for sure the gods
In wisdom should transcend man's grovelling race.

[Exit Officer.]

CHORUS.

ODE.

I. I.

A rock supplies, as we are told, In such abundance the exhaustless rill, That oft the virgins 'gainst its basis hold

Their copious urns to fill.

One of our associate train

Thither, in the limpid wave,

Went, her purple vests to lave, Then hung them dripping on a cliff, to drain And imbibe the sunny gale:

And imbibe the sunny gale:

I from her first caught this tale:

I. 2.

That with sickness faint, alone, In yonder palace on her sleepless bed Our queen reclines, she a thin veil hath thrown

Over her beauteous head:
This the third revolving day,
Since, o'erpowered by lingering pains,
She from all nourishment abstains,

Wasting that lovely frame with slow decay; She thus her hidden griefs would end, Thus to the silent grave descend.

II. I.

From some god this impulse springs; Sure Pan or Hecaté have fired thy brain, Or awful Cybelé to vex thee brings

Her priests, a frantic train; Perhaps, exulting in the chase, Thee Dictynna doth pursue, For neglecting homage due

Her altar with the promised cates to grace, She swiftly glides o'er mountain steep, Fords the lake or billowy deep. II. 2

Have another's witching charms Seduced the monarch to a stol'n embrace; Doth then a harlot in thy Theseus' arms

The nuptial couch disgrace?

Or from Cretan shores I ween

Some sailor crossed the billowy main,

Reached this hospitable plain

Reached this hospitable plain,
And bore a doleful message to the queen:
Hence with deepest anguish pained
In her bed is she detained.

III

Some hidden grief with pregnant throes combined Oft dwells upon the female mind,

Erst in my entrails raged this hidden smart:

Diana, that celestial maid,

Amid the pangs of childbirth wont to aid, I then invoked, and she, whose dart

Pierces the hind, with tutelary care

Descended at her votary's prayer, And with her brought each friendly power Who guards our sex in that distressful hour.

But lo! her aged nurse before the gates Leads out the queen, over whose downcast brow Care spreads a deeper cloud: my inmost soul Burns with impatience to explore the grief Which prays in secret on her fading charms.

PHÆDRA, NURSE, CHORUS.

Nurse. Ye wretched mortals, who by loathed disease
Are visited! What shall I do to aid thee,
Or what shall I omit? The solar beams
Here mayst thou view, here find a cooling air.
For we without the palace doors have borne
The couch where sickening thou reclin'st. Thy talk
Was all of coming hither: but in haste
Back to thy chamber soon wilt thou return:
For thou, each moment altering, tak'st delight
In nothing long; the present quickly grows
Unpleasing, somewhat absent thou esteem'st

More grateful. Better were it to be sick Than tend the lingering patient, for the first Is but a simple ill, the last unites The mind's more pungent griefs and manual toil. But the whole life of man abounds with woe, Our labours never cease; yet sure there is, There is a blest futurity, concealed Behind thick night's impenetrable veil. We therefore seem mistaken, when we dote On vonder sun, that o'er this nether earth Displays its glittering beams, because we know No other life, nor have the realms beneath Been e'er laid open: but by tales, devised To cheat, at random are we borne away.

Phædra. Lift up my body, prop my sinking head, Each limb, my friends, has lost its strength; sustain, O ye who on your wretched mistress tend, My hands, which hang quite motionless: away With cumbrous ornaments, the caul remove, And let these tresses o'er my shoulders flow.

Nurse. Daughter, be cheerful, and compose to rest Thy languid frame: thou, if with patience armed And generous fortitude of soul, wilt bear Thy sickness better. For mankind are doomed By fate to struggle with a load of ills.

Phædra. How shall I drink at yonder limpid fount The cooling waters, and 'midst grassy vales Recline my wearied limbs beneath the shade Of spreading alders?

Nurse. What confused discourse Escapes thee? Utter not before the crowd Such words as closely border on distraction.

Phædra. Lead to you mount; I tread the piny grove, Where the staunch hounds along the mazy track Follow their prey, and, lightly bounding, seize The dappled stag. Ye gods, with my shrill voice What joy to rouse them, while my auburn hair Floats in the wanton gale, and brandish round In my firm hand Thessalia's pointed lance.

Nurse. Whence, O my child, proceed these anxious cares? What business with the chase hast thou? Why

thirst

For the pure fountain, while a constant spring, Whose waters thou mayst drink, flows hard beside The citadel?

Phædra. Dread Artemis, thou goddess
Presiding o'er yon sacred lake, who aid'st
The fleet-hoofed racer, bear me o'er thy fields

To tame Hennetia's coursers.

Why repeat

These incoherent words? But now to climb
The mountain's lofty summit was thy wish
That thou might'st hunt, then on the sandy beach
To drive thy steeds. O for an abler seer
Who can expound what god with iron curb
Subdues my daughter and perverts thy soul.

Phædra. Ah, what have I been doing? Wretched me!
From my right senses whither have I wandered?
Into this frenzy I, alas! am plunged
By some malignant demon. Yet once more
Cover my head. The words which I have spoken
Fill me with conscious shame, and many a tear
Streams down my cheeks; I feel the rising blush,
And know not where to turn these eyes. The pang,
When reason reassumes her throne, is great.
Though madness be an evil: yet 'tis best
When in that state unconscious we expire.

Nurse. Thee thus I cover: but ah, when will death Cover my body? A long life hath taught me Full many a useful lesson. Friendships formed With moderation for the human race Are most expedient, and not such as pierce The marrow of their souls: with the same ease As they the sacred chords entwine they ought To slacken them at will. But for one heart To suffer twofold anguish, as I grieve For my unhappy mistress, is a load Beyond endurance. 'Tis remarked, there springs From all sensations too intense, more pain Than pleasure, and our health they oft impair. A foe to all excess, I rather praise This sentence, "Not too much of anything;" And in my judgment will the wise concur.

Chorus. Thou aged dame, who hast with steadfast zeal

Attended royal Phædra, we observe What agonies she suffers, but discern not The nature of her malady; and wish By thee to be instructed whence it springs.

Nurse. I know not; for no answer will she give To my inquiries.

Nor the source whence rise Chorus.

Her sufferings? Your account and mine agree: Nurse.

For she on all these points remains still dumb. Chorus. How faint and wasted seems that graceful form!

Nurse. No wonder: since she tasted any food

This day's the third.

By Ate's wrath o'ercome, Chorus.

Or does she strive to die?

To die she strives,

And by such abstinence her life would end. Chorus. Strange is thy tale: this cannot please her lord. Nurse. From him she hides her sickness, and pretends

To be in health.

If in her face he look, Chorus. Can he not read it?

To a foreign land

From hence, alas! he went, nor yet returns.

Chorus. Why art thou not more urgent to explore

This malady, these wanderings of her soul? Nurse. Without effect all methods have I tried: Yet with the self-same zeal will I persist, That ye may testify the strong attachment Which I to my unhappy queen have borne. O my loved daughter, let us both forget What we have said: be thou more mild, that gloom Which overcasts thy brow, those harsh resolves, Lay thou aside, and if to thee erewhile I spoke amiss, in milder accents now Will I express myself; if under pains Thou labour, such as may not be revealed, To succour thee thy female friends are here. But if the other sex may know thy sufferings, Let the physician try his healing art. In either case, why silent? It behoves thee,

O daughter, to reply; and, if I speak

Unwittingly, reprove me, if aright,
With wholesome admonition, O concur.
Say somewhat: cast one look this way. Ah me!
But listen to this truth, though more perverse
Than ocean's waves: thy children, if thou die,
Will be deserted, and can have no share
In the paternal house: for his first queen,
That martial Amazonian dame, hath borne
Their sire a son to lord it o'er thy race,
Though illegitimate, with liberal views
Trained up from infancy, him well thou know'st,
Hippolytus.

Phædra. Ah me!

Nurse. Doth then that name

Affect thee?

Phædra. You have ruined me; peace, peace:
Be silent, I conjure you by the gods,
Speak of that man no more.

Nurse. With open eyes,
And senses now restored, canst thou neglect
Thy children's interest, nor preserve thy life?

Phædra. I love my children: but another storm Assails me.

Nurse. O my daughter, sure thy hands

Are undefiled with blood?

Phædra. My hands are pure,

Yet doth pollution harbour in my soul.

Nurse. Proceeds this mischief from some foe?

Phædra. A friend—
An unconsenting friend, alas!—destroys me,
Nor do I perish through my own consent.

Nurse. Hath Theseus wronged thee?

Phædra. May I ne'er be found

To have injured him!

Nurse. Then what important cause

Precipitates thy death?

Phædra. Indulge my error;
For I 'gainst you offend not.

Nurse. My assent
To such request would be a breach of duty.

Phadra. What mean you by this violence? Why hang Upon my hand?

In suppliant posture thus, Nurse. Thus to thy knees for ever will I cling. Phædra. If you, unhappy woman, heard my woes,

You would partake them.

What severer woe Nurse. Can possibly befall me than the loss Of thee, my honoured mistress? For I see

Thou art resolved to perish. This affair Phædra.

To me will bring renown.

Why then conceal Those merits into which I wish t' inquire?

Phædra. Me virtuous motives prompt to deeds of shame. Nurse. Reveal those motives, hence shalt thou appear

More noble.

O depart, I by the gods Phædra. Conjure you, and release my hand.

Nurse. Not thus. If this request from me thou still withhold.

Phædra. I will comply; for you, my aged suppliant, Such due respect I entertain.

In silence Nurse. Will I attend: now is it thine to speak.

Phædra. My wretched mother, what a love was thine! Nurse. Why shouldst thou name her passion for that bull?

Phadra. And you, my hapless sister, Bacchus' wife-Nurse. What ails thee? Why dost thou recount the shame

Of these thy kindred? But of me the third. Phædra.

How wretched is the fate!

Thou strik'st me dumb.

Where will this history end?

Phædra. Thence spring my woes, Woes of no recent date.

I understand As little of the secret I would learn, As if thou still wert silent.

How should you Phædra. Divine my thoughts so as t' anticipate What I would speak?

No prophetess am I, These mysteries with precision to unfold.

Phædra. Say what is that which men entitle love?

Nurse. Love is a mixture formed of sweetest joys

And torments most severe.

Phædra. The last of these

Have I experienced.

Nurse. Daughter, ha, what saidst thou? For whom thus burn'st thou with forbidden fires? Phædra. Who is that son of th' Amazonian dame? Nurse. Mean'st thou Hippolytus?

Phædra.

That name was uttered.

Wurse.

Ah, what words are these?

How hast thou ruined me! This, O my friends,
Is not to be endured; I cannot live
To bear it: to these eyes the lamp of day
Grows odious; the encumbrance of this body
Will I cast off, nor on such tenure hold
A being I abhor. And now farewell
For ever! Count me dead. Chaste matrons yield
With some reluctance, yet to lawless love
At length they yield. Venus is then no goddess,
But somewhat more than goddess: for my queen
And me, and this whole house, hath she destroyed.

By you, not me,

CHORUS.

Too clear thou heard'st the royal dame confess
The horrors which her bosom stain:
O had I died ere this severe distress
Check receov's cost and fired her frontis brain!

Shook reason's seat and fired her frantic brain!

Thy sorrows are by Heaven decreed.

Ye miseries on which mortals feed!
Thy shame lies open to the sun,

And thou, my royal mistress, art undone.

Short is thy date: What cruel fate,

Such as with life alone can end, Shall to the grave thy steps attend! I see, I see through time's deep gloom, These mansions fall by Venus' doom: Such revolution is at hand,

Thee, hapless Cretan nymph, the fates demand.

Phædra. O ye Træzenian matrons, who reside On this extremity of the domains Where Pelops ruled; through many a wakeful night Have I considered whence mankind became Thus universally corrupt, and deem That to the nature of the human soul Our frailties are not owing, for to form Sound judgments is a privilege enjoyed By many. But the matter in this light Ought to be viewed; well knowing what is good, We practise not. Some do amiss through sloth, Others to virtue's rigid laws prefer Their pleasures; for with various pleasures life Is furnished; conversation lengthened out Beyond due bounds; ease, that bewitching pest And shame, of which there are two kinds—one leads To virtue, by the other is a house Involved in woe; but if the proper season For our expressing shame were ascertained With due precision, things which bear one name Could not have differed thus. When in my mind I had revolved these thoughts, to me it seemed As if no magic had sufficient power To warp the steadfast purpose of my soul. Here I to you the progress of my heart Will next unfold, since love with his keen shafts These wounds inflicted; studious how to bear. As it became me, this abhorred disease I from that time have by a wary silence Concealed the pangs I suffer. For the tongue Must not be trusted, well can it suggest To others wholesome counsels when they err, Though to its owner oft it proves the source Of grievous ills. I next this amorous rage With firmness was determined to endure, And conquer it by chastity. At length, When all these sage expedients proved too weak O'er Venus to prevail, my best resource I thought was death: none hath a right to blame These counsels. May my virtues be conspicuous; But when I act amiss, I would avoid Too many witnesses. That on such deed.

And e'en the inclination to transgress, Disgrace attends, I knew, and was aware That if from honour's paths a woman swerve She to the world is odious. On her head Be tenfold ruin heaped who first presumed To introduce adulterers, and defile The nuptial couch; from those of nobler birth Begun this evil through our sex to spread. For when foul deeds please those who erst have borne A virtuous character, to souls depraved They recommend themselves beneath a form Of seeming excellence. Those too I hate Whose words are modest, but their lives impure In private. O thou goddess, who didst rise From ocean, lovely Venus, how can these Without a blush their injured lords behold? Tremble they not, lest their accomplice darkness, Or lest the vaulted roofs of their abodes, Should send forth an indignant voice? This robs Your queen of life, my friends: so shall the charge Of having shamed my lord, my children shamed, Be never urged against me: free and blest With liberty of speech, in the famed city Of Athens, they shall dwell, maternal fame Transmitted for their portion. E'en the man Of dauntless courage dwindles to a slave If conscious that his mother or his sire Have acted wickedly. One only good, A just and virtuous soul, the wise affirm, Strives for pre-eminence with life: for time, At length, when like some blooming nymph her charms Contemplating, he to our eyes holds up His mirror, every guilty wretch displays. Among that number may I ne'er be found! Chorus. Wherever we discern it, O how fair Is modesty, that source of bright renown! Nurse. O queen, at first, an instantaneous shock, I, from the history of thy woes, received: Now am I sensible my fears were groundless. But frequently the second thoughts of man Are more discreet; for there is nothing strange Nought, in thy sufferings, foreign to the course

Of nature: thee the goddess in her rage Invades. Thou lov'st. And why should this surprise? Many as well as thee have done the same. Art thou resolved to cast thy life away Because thou lov'st? How wretched were the state Of those who love, and shall hereafter love, If death must thence ensue! For though too strong To be withstood, when she with all her might Assails us, Venus gently visits those Who yield; but if she light on one who soars With proud and overweening views too high, As thou mayst well conceive, to utter scorn Such she exposes; through the boundless tracts Of air she glides, and reigns 'midst ocean's waves: All things from her their origin derive, 'Tis she that in each breast the genial seeds Of potent love infuses, and from love Descends each tribe that fills the peopled earth. They who with ancient writings have conversed, And ever dwell among the tuneful Nine, Know how to Theban Semele's embrace Flew amorous Jove, how bright Aurora stole Young Cephalus, and placed among the gods The object of her passion: yet in Heaven They still reside, where unabashed they meet Their kindred gods; those gods, because they feel A sympathetic wound, I deem, indulge Their weakness: and wilt thou refuse to bear Like imperfections? Nature on these terms Decreed thou from thy father shouldst receive Thy being: look for other gods, or yield Hast thou observed, Submission to these laws. How many husbands, men who are endued With a superior wisdom, when they see The nuptial bed by secret lust defiled, Appear as though they saw not: and how oft The fathers, if their sons transgress, connive At their unhappy passion? To conceal Unseemly actions is no triffing part Of human wisdom; nor should man his life Form with too great precision; for the roof. The covering from the storm, the builder leaves

Less fair, less highly finished. If immersed In evils great as those thou hast described. How canst thou hope to 'scape? But if thy virtues, Since thou art only human, far exceed Thy failings, it is well with thee: desist, O my loved daughter, from thy evil purpose, And cease to utter these reproachful words: For there is nought but contumelious pride In thy endeavour to be yet more perfect Than the immortal gods: endure thy passion With fortitude, since 'twas the will divine That thou shouldst love: but give a prosperous turn, If possible, to thy disease. For songs There are with magic virtues fraught, and words Which soothe the soul: hence an effectual cure May be obtained: in such discovery man Would long in vain be busied, to our sex If no spontaneous stratagem occur.

Chorus. Though her advice, amid thy present woes,
O Phædra, be more useful, I applaud
Thy better purpose: yet applause unsought
May haply give offence, and to thine ear
Convey sounds harsher than her specious words.

Phædra. 'Tis this, e'en this, too plausible a tongue,
Which states administered by wholesome laws,
And houses of the mighty, hath o'erthrown:
Nor should we utter what delights the ear,
But for renown a generous thirst instil.

Nurse. What means this grave harangue? No need has

Of well-turned phrases, but the man thou lov'st. Look out with speed for those who, in clear terms, Will to the prince thy real state unfold. But had not such calamities assailed Thy life, and thou remained virtuous dame, I ne'er, to gratify thy wild desires, Would have enticed thee to a lawless bed But now this great exertion, to preserve Thy life, is such that envy could not blame

Phadra. Detested speech! Will you ne'er close that mouth
And the ungrateful repetition cease
Of words so infamous?

Nurse.

Nurse. What I proposed,

Though culpable it be, far better suits
Thy interests than severer virtue's rules;
For indiscretion, if it save thy life,
Hath far more merit than that empty name
Thy pride would make thee perish to retain.

Phædra. I by the gods conjure you to desist
(For you, in terms too plausible, express
Things that are infamous), nor in this strain
Attempt to prove that, yielding up my soul
To love, I shall act right: for if you paint
Foul deeds with specious colours, in the snares
From which I now am 'scaping I afresh

Shall be entangled.

Hadst thou earlier formed
These rigid notions, thou shouldst ne'er have erred.
But since this cannot be, my counsel hear:
From thee this second favour I request;
I in my house have philtres to assuage
The pangs of love (which but just now occurred
To my remembrance); these, nor to disgrace
Exposing thee, nor of such strong effect
As to impair thy reason, yet will work
On this thy malady a perfect cure,
Unless through mere perverseness thou refuse
To make th' experiment: for we from him
Thou lov'st, must either take a sign, a word,
Or fragment of his robe, to join two hearts
In mutual love.

Phædra. But is this wondrous medicine
You recommend an ointment or a potion?

Nurse. I cannot tell. Search for a cure, my child,
And not instruction.

Phædra. Greatly do I fear Your wisdom will be carried to excess.

Nurse. Know then thou art disposed to be alarmed

At everything. But whence arise these terrors?

Phædra. Aught that hath passed, lest you to Theseus' son Should mention.

Nurse. Peace, O daughter, be it mine To manage this aright: I only sue, Benignant goddess, sprung from ocean's waves,

That thou, O Venus, wouldst my projects aid. But to our friends within, will it suffice The rest of my intentions to unfold.

Exit NURSE.

CHORUS.

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O love, whose sweet delusions fly, Instilling passion through the eye, And steal upon the heart, Never thus my soul engage, Come not with immoderate rage, Nor choose thy keenest dart: Not the lightning's awful glare, Not the thunderbolts of Jove,

Such destructive terrors bear, As strongly vibrate in the shafts of love.

On Alpheus' banks in vain, in vain, Or at Apollo's Delphic fane,

Whole herds of slaughtered kine Doth Greece present, if we neglect Venus' son, who claims respect,

The genial couch his shrine: With the vengeance of a foe, If the deity invades,

On man he pours forth every woe, And crowds with victims all the Stygian shades.

II. I.

By Venus was Œchalia's maid, Of hymeneal bonds afraid,

Consigned in days of yore, Like a wild filly to the yoke,

Espoused 'midst horrid slaughter, smoke,

And rites profaned with gore; Indignant was the virgin led, Streaming with dishevelled hair, To the stern Alcides' bed,

While bridal shouts were mingled with despair.

Unite, thou sacred Theban wall, And fountain famed from Dirce's fall, To witness with what might

Resistless Cytherea came,

Brandishing ethereal flame; To everlasting night,

She, beauteous Semele consigned,

Who to Jove Lyæus bore: Her breath's a pestilential wind,

Our heads she like the bee still hovers o'er.

Phadra. Restrain your tongues: we, O my friends, are ruined. Chorus. O Phædra, say what terrible event

In thy abode hath happened?

Not a word Phædra

Must now be uttered: I would hear these sounds Which issue from the palace.

We are silent:

Yet must this prelude sure denote some ill.

Phædra. Wretch that I am! How dreadful are my woes! Chorus. What shrieks, alas! are these—what clamorous sounds

> By thee now uttered? Speak, my hapless queen, What sudden rumour terrifies thy soul?

Phadra. We are undone, but stand ye at these doors And listen to the uproar raised within.

Chorus. Thou to those portals art already close, And in the voice which issues from the palace Hast a great interest, therefore say what ill Hath happened.

Phædra. Stern Hippolytus, the son Of that intrepid Amazonian dame, In loudest tone full many a horrid curse Is uttering 'gainst my servant.

Chorus. A mere noise Is all I hear, yet cannot I collect

A single word distinctly: passing through These doors their sound hath surely reached thine

Phædra. He plainly calls her harbinger of vice, And the betrayer of her sovereign's bed. Chorus. Wretch that I am! Thou, O my dearest queen, Hast been betrayed. What counsel can I give? The mystery is laid open; thou art ruined—Utterly ruined.

Phædra.

Ah!

Chorus. Thy friends have proved Unfaithful to their trust.

Phædra. To her I owe
My ruin, who, though prompted by her love,
Unwisely my calamity disclosed,
Hoping the desperate malady to heal.

Chorus. What part, alas! remains for thee to act, Surrounded by inevitable mischiefs? Phædra. But one expedient for my present ills

I know: their only cure is instant death.

HIPPOLYTUS, NURSE, PHÆDRA, CHORUS.

Hippolytus. Earth, mother of us all, and sun, whose beams

Diffuse their splendour wide, what words, unfit For any tongue to utter, reached these ears!

Nurse. Peace, O my son, lest some one hear thy voice.

Hippolytus. I cannot bury such atrocious crimes

As these in silence.

Vurse. By that fair right hand, Thee I implore.

Hippolytus. Profane not by your touch My garment.

Grovelling at thy knees, I crave
Thou wouldst not ruin me.

Hippolytus. Why wish to check

My tongue, if you, as you pretend, have said Nought that is blamable?

Nurse. Yet must my words

On no account be published.

Hippolytus. To the world

What's virtuous may with honour be revealed.

Nurse. Forget not thus the reverence, O my son,

Due to a solemn oath

Due to a solemn oath.

Hippolytus. Athough my tongue
Hath sworn, my soul is from the compact free.

Nurse. O thou rash youth, what mean'st thou? Art thou bent

On the destruction of thy friends?

Hippolytus. I hold
The friendships of the wicked in abhorrence.

Nurse. Forgive me: error is the lot of man.

Hippolytus. By a fair semblance to deceive the world,
Wherefore, O Jove, beneath the solar beams
That evil, woman, didst thou cause to dwell?
For if it was thy will the human race
Should multiply, this ought not by such means
To be effected: better in thy fane
Each votary, on presenting brass or steel,
Or massive ingots of resplendent gold,
Proportioned to his offering, might from thee
Obtain a race of sons, and under roofs
Which genuine freedom visits, unannoyed
By women, live. But to receive this worst
Of evils, now no sooner are our doors
Thrown open than the riches of our house
We utterly exhaust. How great a pest

Thrown open than the riches of our house
We utterly exhaust. How great a pest
Is woman this one circumstance displays;
The very father who begot and nurtured,
A plenteous dower advancing, sends her forth,
That of such losthed incumbrance he may rid

That of such loathed incumbrance he may rid His mansions: but the hapless youth, who takes This noxious inmate to his bed, exults

While he caparisons a worthless image, In gorgeous ornaments and tissued vests

Squandering his substance. With some noble

race

He who by wedlock a connection forms
Is bound by hard necessity to keep
The loathsome consort; if perchance he gain
One who is virtuous sprung from worthless sires,
He by the good compensates for the ills
Attending such a union. Happier he,
Unvexed by these embarrassments, whose bride
Inactive through simplicity, and mild,
To his abode is like a statue fixed.
All female wisdom doth my soul abhor.
Never may the aspiring dame, who grasps

At knowing more than to her sex belongs, Enter my house: for in the subtle breast Are deeper stratagems by Venus sown: But she whose reason is too weak to frame A plot, from amorous frailties lives secure. No female servant ever should attend The married dame, she rather ought to dwell Among wild beasts, who are by nature mute, Lest she should speak to any, or receive Their answers. But the wicked now devise Mischief in secret chambers, while abroad Their confidants promote it: thus, vile wretch. In privacy you came, with me to form An impious treaty for surrendering up My royal father's unpolluted bed. Soon from such horrors in the limpid spring My ears will I make pure: how could I rush Into the crime itself, when, having heard Only the name made mention of, I feel As though I some defilement thence had caught? Base woman, know 'tis my religion saves Your forfeit life, for by a solemn oath If to the gods I had not unawares Engaged myself, I ne'er would have refrained From stating these transactions to my sire; But now, while Theseus in a foreign land Continues, hence will I depart, and keep The strictest silence. But I soon shall see, When with my injured father I return, How you and your perfidious queen will dare To meet his eyes, then fully shall I know Your impudence, of which I now have made This first essay. Perdition seize you both: For with unsatiated abhorrence, still 'Gainst woman will I speak, though some object To my repeating always the same charge: For they are ever uniformly wicked: Let any one then prove the female sex Possest of chastity, or suffer me, As heretofore, against them to inveigh. Exit HIPPOLYTUS. CHORUS.

Antistrophe.

O wretched woman's inauspicious fate!

What arts, what projects can we find,

To extricate ourselves, ere yet too late,

From our distress, or how the snare unbind?

Phadra. Just are the sufferings I endure:

Thou earth and sun, my anguish cure. How, O my friends, shall I avoid The stroke of fate before I am destroyed?

Or how conceal
The pangs I feel?
What tutelary god is near,
What friendly mortal will appear
To aid me in this hour of shame?
Afflictions and an evil name

The remnant of my life must vex:

I now am the most wretched of my sex.

Chorus. Alas! all now is over; O my queen,
The stratagems thy hapless servant framed
Fail of success, and desperate are thy fortunes.

Phædra. O villanous destroyer of your friends,

How have you ruined me! May Jove my grandsire Uproot you in his vengeance from the earth. And smite with thunderbolts that perjured head. When I your baleful stratagems foresaw, How oft did I enjoin you to conceal That fatal truth, from whose discovery spring The torments I endure: but you the secret Contained not, hence with an unspotted fame I cannot die, but some fresh scheme must forge. For this rash youth, his soul with anger fired, Will to his father my offence relate, Inform the aged Pittheus of my woes, And with this history, to my foul reproach, Fill the whole world. May just perdition seize Both you and all who by dishonest means Their unconsenting friends are prompt to aid.

Nurse. Thou, O my royal mistress, mayst condemn The fault I have committed: for thy griefs Are so severe that they awhile o'ercome Thy better judgment. But wouldst thou admit My answer, I could make one: thee I nurtured, And in thy happiness an interest feel. But searching for a medicine to remove Thy sickness, what I least could wish I found Success had stamped me wise: for by events Are our opinions influenced

Phædra. Is it just,
And satisfactory, thus first to wound,
And then dispute with me?

Nurse. We dwell too long
On this unhappy subject: I confess
My folly: but, O daughter, there are means
To extricate thee still from all thy woes.

Phædra. End this harangue; you counselled me amiss At first, and undertook a vile design.Go mind your own affairs: be mine the task, What interests me, to settle as I ought.

[Exit NURSE.

But, O my noble friends, Træzenian dames, Thus far indulgent to my earnest prayer, In silence bury what you here have heard.

Chorus. I call, Diana, venerable daughter
Of Jove, to witness I will ne er reveal
Aught of thy sorrows.

Phædra. Ye have spoken well.

But after weighing all things in my mind,
I one expedient have at length devised
In this calamity, which may secure
To my loved sons an honourable life,
And to myself, encompassed by such woes
As now befall me, some relief afford.
For I will never scandalize the house
Of Crete, nor come, after so base a deed,
Into the presence of offended Theseus,
To save one single life.

Chorus. Art thou then bent
On mischief such as cannot be recalled?

Phædra. To die is my resolve: but by what means
I must deliberate.

Chorus. More auspicious words
Than these I crave.

Phædra.

Is wholesome counsel. For the Cyprian queen,
To whom I owe my ruin, I this day
Shall gratify, thus yielding up my life,
Vanquished by ruthless love. But after death
I to another shall become a curse;
Hence shall he learn no longer to exult
In my disastrous fortunes, but acquire
Discretion, while my anguish he partakes.

[Exit PHÆDRA.

CHORUS.

ODE.

2700000

I. I.

To where yon rock o'erhangs the main
Waft me, ye gods, thence bid me spring,
Transformed into a bird, on vigorous wing
Through trackless ether mid the feathered train:

With rapid pinions would I soar On high above the Adriatic shore,

And Po's impetuous stream,
Fixed on whose banks that virgin choir,
Who spring from an immortal sire,
Intent on the same dolorous theme,
Still weep for Phaeton's untimely end,

While 'midst the purple tide their amber tears descend.

I. 2.

On to those coasts would I proceed
Where the Hesperides their song
Attune; no mariner can thence prolong
The voyage, for, his daring bark t' impede,
Neptune those hallowed bounds maintains,
Where Atlas with unwearied toil sustains
The heavens' incumbent load;
And from a never-failing spring
Ambrosia's streams their tribute bring,
Watering those chambers, Jove's abode:
There the glad soil its choicest gifts supplies

Obedient to the reign of happy deities.

II. I.

Across yon hoarse resounding main,
O bark of Crete, those hastier gales,
Which caught the snowy canvas of thy sails,
Conveyed my mistress, but conveyed in vain;
By fate from prosperous manions torm

By fate from prosperous mansions torn, To nuptial rites unhallowed was she borne,

And scenes of future shame: For surely from her native land, To the renowned Athenian strand, She with a luckless omen came;

Though, to the shore their twisted cables bound, With joy the sailors leaped on fair Munychia's ground.

II. 2.

Her strength in lingering sickness spent,
Hence is she ordained to prove
How great the tortures of unlawful love,
By the command of angry Venus sent,
And after struggling long in vain,

Defeated by intolerable pain,

Her snowy neck around,

To bind that galling noose, revolves,

Which from her bridal roofs devolves,

Awed by the heaven-inflicted wound':

Choosing to perish thus with glory blest, She, cruel love expels, the soul's tyrannic pest.

3-9 Estimol Messenger, Chorus.

Messenger. Ho! ho! All ye who near the palace stand, With speed come hither; by the fatal cord, Our queen, the wife of Theseus, is destroyed.

Chorus. The deed, alas! is done. My royal mistress Suspended in the noose is now no more.

Messenger. Why are ye not more swift? Will no one bring The sharpened steel, that, with its aid, this instant

The bandage we may sever from her neck?

1st Semichorus. What shall we do? Were it not best, my friends,

To rush into the palace, and our queen Loose from the knot which her own hands have tied? 2nd Semichorus. But why do the young servants, in this hour Of woe, absent themselves? To be too busy Is never safe.

Messenger. Extend the hapless body;
Unwelcome office to the lords I serve.

Exit MESSENGER.

Chorus. From what I hear, this miserable dame
Hath left the world: for they are stretching forth
Her corse as one who is already dead.

3-20 6/

THESEUS, CHORUS

Theseus. O woman, know ye what loud voice is that
Within the palace? From the menial train
Of damsels, shrieks most grievous reached my ear.
None of my household, opening wide the gates,
Deign to receive me with auspicious words
On my return from the prophetic shrine.
Hath aught befall'n the venerable Pittheus?
What though he be already far advanced
Into the vale of years, yet would his death
These mansions with a general sorrow fill.

Chorus. Fate in its march, O Theseus, hath not pierced The aged: they who in the bloom of youth Are now cut off your sorrows will demand.

Theseus. Ah me! Hath cruel death then torn away
One of my sons?

Chorus. They live, while breathless lies
Their mother; and most piteous was her end.

Theseus. What saidst thou? Is my dearest Phædra dead?
Through what mischance?

Chorus. She tied the fatal noose.

Theseus. Had grief congealed her blood? Or was she urged
To this by some calamitous event?

Chorus. We only know the fact: for to the palace
Am I just come, O Theseus, that with yours
My sorrows I may mingle.

Theseus.

Round these brows

Why do I wear a garland, but to show

That I the oracle in luckless hour

Have visited? Unbar those doors, my servants,

Open them wide, that I the wretched corse

Of my dear wife may view, who by her death Hath ruined me.

[The palace doors are opened, and the body of Phædra is discovered, with a veil thrown over it.]

Chorus. Thy woes, unhappy queen,
Were dreadful; yet thou such a deed has wrought
As in confusion this whole house will plunge:
Presumptuous, violent, unnatural death
By thine own hand inflicted: for, ah! who—

Who but thyself was author of thy fall? Theseus. Wretch that I am! How many and how great Are my afflictions? But of all the ills Which I have felt, this last is most severe. Me and these mansions with what terrors armed O fortune, dost thou visit! From some fiend This unforeseen dishonour takes its rise. A life like mine is not to be endured, And worse than death itself: for I so vast An ocean of calamity behold, That I can never hope to swim to land, Or stem these overwhelming waves of woe. Thee how shall I accost, or in what terms Sufficiently deplore thy wretched fate? Swift as a bird 'scaped from the fowler's hand Hence hast thou vanished with impetuous flight, To the domains of sullen Pluto borne. Grievous, alas! most grievous are these woes. But from some ancient stores of wrath, reserved By vengeful Heaven to punish the misdeeds Of a progenitor, I sure derive This great calamity.

Chorus. Not you alone
Have such afflictions visited, O king;
You but in common with a thousand mourners
Have lost the noble partner of your bed.

Theseus. Under earth's deepest caverns would I dwell,
Amid the shades of everlasting night,
A wretch best numbered with the silent dead,
Now I, alas! for ever am bereft
Of thy loved converse; for thou hast destroyed
Me rather than thyself. Who will inform me

Whence death, with ruthless destiny combined,
Thy vitals reached? Can any one disclose
The real fact; or doth this palace harbour
A menial swarm in vain? For thee, for thee,
Alas, I grieve! What sorrows of my house,
Too great to be supported or expressed,
Are these which I have witnessed! But I perish;
These mansions are a desert, and my sons
Have lost their mother.

Chorus.

Thou hast left, hast left
Thy friends, thou dearest and thou best of women,
Whom the resplendent sun or glimmering moon
E'er visited in her nocturnal round.
O my unhappy, my unhappy queen!
This house what dreadful evils have befallen!
Thy fate bedews these swimming eyes with tears;

But, shuddering, to the sequel of our woes

Already I look forward.

Theseus.

Ha! what means
The letter which she clasps in her dear hand,
What fresh intelligence can it contain?
Hath the deceased here written a request
For aught that to the marriage bed pertains,
And her sons' welfare? Thou pale shade, rely
On this assurance, that no other dame
The widowed couch of Theseus shall ascend,
Or enter these abodes. Yet with such force
These well-known characters the golden ring
Of her who is no more hath here impressed
Allure me, that the seal I will burst open,
And learn what charge to me she would convey.

Chorus. Some god, alas! hath in succession heaped
Evil on evil! such my fate, that life
Will be no longer any life to me
After this deed of horror. I pronounce
The house of my devoted kings o'erthrown,
And now no more a house. Yet, O ye gods,
This family, if possible forbear
To crush, and listen to my fervent vow.
Yet, like the soothsayer, my foreboding soul
An evil omen views.

Theseus.

To my past woes,
What woes, alas! are added, far too great
To be endured or uttered! Wretched me!

Chorus. What fresh event is this? Speak, if the secret

To me you can disclose.

Theseus. With loudest voice,

The letter echoes such atrocious crimes As are not to be borne. To 'scape this load Of misery, whither, whither shall I fly?

For I, alas! am utterly undone.

What strains of horror have these wretched eyes Beheld, in that portentous scroll expressed!

Chorus. All that is terrible your words announce.

Theseus. Within the door of my indignant lips
No longer thus will I contain a deed

Of unexampled guilt. O city, city!
Hippolytus with brutal force hath dared
To violate my bed, and set at nought

Jove's awful eye. O Neptune, O my sire, Since thou hast firmly promised that thou

thrice

Wouldst grant me what I prayed for; now fulfil One vow, and slay my son, nor let him 'scape This single day, if thou with me design To ratify the compact thou hast made.

Chorus. Recall that imprecation to the gods:

For you, O king, your error will perceive;

Attend to my advice.

These ears are closed:

Moreover I will drive him from the land; For of these twofold fates, or this or that Must smite him; Neptune, when he hears my

curses,

Will plunge the miscreant to the shades of hell; Else, cast forth from this region, and ordained To wander in some foreign land, a life Of the profoundest misery shall he drag.

Chorus. Behold how seasonably your son himself,

Hippolytus, is coming: O subdue, My royal lord, subdue that baleful rage; Consult the good of your unhappy house. HIPPOLYTUS, THESEUS, CHORUS.

Hippolytus. Hearing your voice, I with the utmost speed
Am hither come, O father; though whence rise
These groans I know not, and from you would
learn.

learn.
Ha! what is here? Your consort, O my sire,
I see, a breathless corse: this needs must cause
The greatest wonder. Since I left her living
How short the intervening space! But now
She oped those eyes to view the radiant sun.
What dire mischance befell her, in what manner
She died, inform me. Are you silent still?
In our calamities of no avail
Is silence: for solicitous to know
All that hath passed, with greediness the heart
Explores a tale of woe; nor is it just,
My father, your afflictions to conceal
From friends, and those who are yet more than
friends.

Theseus. O mortals, why, unprofitably lost
In many errors, strive ye to attain
A thousand specious arts, some new device
Still meditating, yet ye neither know
One rare attainment, nor by your inquiries
Could ever reach the gift of teaching those
Who lack discretion how to think aright?

Hippolytus. The sage you speak of, he who could compel Fools to grow wise, must be expert indeed.

But since the subtle arguments you use
Are so ill-timed, my sire, I greatly fear
Your woes should cause your tongue to go beyond
The bounds of reason.

Theseus.

With some clearer test

Man ought to have been furnished, to discern

The thoughts and sever from the real friend
Each vile impostor. All the human race
Should have two voices—one of sacred truth,
No matter what the other: 'gainst each plot
Devised by foul injustice, hence the first
Might in perpetual evidence come forth,
And none could be deceived.

Hippolytus. Hath any friend

Accused me in your ear, and fixed reproach Upon the guiltless? I with dire amaze Am smitten: in such incoherent words

Your rage bursts forth that horror fills my soul. Theseus. Ah, whither will the mind of man proceed

In its career? Can nature fix no bounds To impudence? For if this evil take Still deeper root through each succeeding age, The son grown more abandoned than the father, In pity to this world the gods should add Another world sufficient to contain All those who swerve from justice and the brood Of sinners. Look upon that impious wretch, Though sprung from my own loins, who hath defiled My nuptial couch; too clearly the deceased His most atrocious villany hath proved. Show then thy face before thy injured sire, Since to this pitch of unexampled guilt Thou hast proceeded. Yet art thou the man Who holds familiar converse with the gods As though his life were perfect? Art thou chaste And pure from all defilement? By thy boasts I will not be deluded, nor suspect Thou canst impose upon the powers divine. Now glory in thy vegetable food, Disciple of the tuneful Orpheus, rave With Bacchus' frantic choir, and let the fumes Of varied learning soothe thee. Thou art caught. From me let all take warning, and avoid Those artful hypocrites who bait the snare With words denoting great austerity, While they contrive base projects. She is dead, And so thou deem'st thyself secure; yet hence Thy guilt, O miscreant, is more clearly proved. What weightier oath, what plea canst thou devise This letter to confute, that thou mayst 'scape Unpunished for thy crime? Wilt thou allege She hated thee, and that thy spurious birth Makes the legitimate thy foes? 'Twill argue

That she was prodigal of life, if thus She forfeited whate'er her soul held dear Through enmity to thee. But man belike Is privileged from lust, whose power innate Misleads frail woman. Well am I aware Both male and female are alike exposed To danger, oft as Cytherea fires The youthful heart, although a partial world Forbear to brand our sex with equal shame. But wherefore in an idle strife of words With thee should I engage, when here, the corse, That witness most irrefragable, lies? With speed an exile from this land depart, Nor dare to enter Athens by the gods Erected, or the bounds of my domain. For if from thee I tamely should submit To wrongs like these, no more would Sinnis tell How erst I slew him at the Isthmian pass, But say my boasts are vain; nor would the rocks Of Schiron, dashed by the surrounding waves. Call me the scourge of villains.

Chorus.

At a loss

As truly happy: for their lot who once Were blest hath undergone a total change. Hippolytus. Though dreadful, O my father, is the wrath And vehement commotion of your soul, The charge against me which now seems so strong, If duly searched into, will prove devoid Of truth and honour. I am not expert At an harangue before assembled crowds, Though somewhat better qualified to speak Among my youthful comrades, and where few Are present: a sufficient cause for this May be assigned; for they who are held cheap Among the wise, in more harmonious strains Address the people. Yet am I constrained By the severe emergency to burst The bonds of silence, and begin my speech With a discussion of that odious charge By you first urged against me, to convict And bar me from replying. Do your eyes Behold the sun and wide extent of earth? Say, what you list; of all the numerous tribes

Am I of any mortal how to speak

Who here were born, there's not a man more chaste Than I am: the first knowledge I acquired Was this—to reverence the immortal gods, And with those friends associate who attempt Nought by the laws condemned, but are endued With a deep sense of virtuous shame, and scorn Either themselves to practise or to aid Unseemly actions. I ne'er made a jest Of those whom I converse with, O my sire, But to my friends have still remained the same When they are absent as when near at hand: And above all, by that peculiar crime In which you think that you have caught me now, Am I untainted: by impure delight I to this day have never been enticed. Of love and its transactions nought I know, Except what I from casual talk have heard Or seen in pictures, but I am not eager To look on these, for still my soul retains Its virgin purity. But if no credence My spotless chastity with you should find, On you is it incumbent to show how I was corrupted. Did your consort's charms Eclipse all other women? Could I hope Beneath your roofs to dwell, and with your wife That I the rich inheritance should gain? This sure had been the highest pitch of folly. But what a bait is empire! None at all To those who are discreet, unless a lust For kingly power already hath corrupted Those who delight in it. O'er all the sons Of Greece, in every honourable strife, Is it my great ambition to prevail, And be the first; but rather in the state Would I live happy with my dearest friends, And occupy the second rank: for bliss Exempt from every danger, there is found, Transcending all that royalty can give. One thing there is by me not mentioned yet: Though all beside already have you heard. Had I a single witness like myself, Of tried veracity, and could debate

With her while yet she lived, you from the fact,
After a strict inquiry, might decide
Which was the criminal. But now, by Jove,
Who guards the oath inviolate, I swear,
And by the conscious ground on which
tread.

That I your consort never did approach—
No, not in will or deed. May I expire
Stript of renown, and overwhelmed with shame,
Torn from my country, my paternal house,
An exile and a vagrant through the world,
Nor may the ocean or the earth receive
My breathless corse, if I have thus transgressed!
I know not whether 'twas through fear she lost
Her life, and more than this I must not say.
With her discretion amply hath supplied
The place of chastity; I still have practised
That virtue, but, alas! without success.

Chorus. Sufficient is it to refute the charge

That thou this oath hast taken, and called down

The powers immortal to attest its truth.

Theseus. Is he not rather an audacious cheat,

Trusting in magic arts, who dares to think

He by an oath can bias the resolves
Of his insulted sire?

Of his insulted sire?

Hippolytus. The part you act
Challenges my astonishment. Were you
My son, and I your father, had you dared
To violate my wife, I would not banish,

But kill you.

Theseus. Seasonable remark: the sentence
Which on thyself with justice thou hast passed.
I will not now inflict; for instant death.
Is grateful to the wretched. But ordained.
An exile from thy native land to roam,
A life of tedious sorrow shalt thou drag.
In foreign realms; such are the wages due

To an unrighteous man.

Hippolytus. What means my sire?

Instead of waiting till impartial time
The merits of my conduct ascertain,
Hence will you banish me?

Theseus. Had I the power,
Beyond the ocean, and where Atlas stands
Upon the utmost limits of the world,
So strong the hatred which to thee I bear—

Hippolytus. What, without searching into any proof From oath, or witness, or the voice of seers, Expel me uncondemned from these domains!

Expel me uncondemned from these domains! Theseus. This letter, which no soothsayer can require

Theseus. This letter, which no soothsayer can require To make it better understood, the charge 'Gainst thee authenticates; so to those birds Who hover o'er our heads I bid adieu.

Hippolytus. Why I am not permitted, O ye gods,
To ope my mouth, when I my ruin owe
To you whom I adore? I will not speak:
For he I ought to move hath 'gainst my voice
Closed his obdurate ears: I should infringe
A solemn oath, and sport with Heaven in vain.

Theseus. To me past all endurance is that mask
Of sanctity which thou assum'st. With speed
Why go'st thou not from thy paternal land?

Hippolytus. Whither can I betake myself? What friend Will to his house admit an exiled wretch Charged with this great offence?

Theseus. Whoe'er receives

Each base invader of the marriage bed,

And with the wicked man delights to dwell.

Hippolytus. What wounds my soul, and from these eyes extorts
The tear, is your believing me so wicked.

Theseus. There was a proper season for these groans
And all thy forethought, when thou to dishonour
The consort of thy father didst presume.

Hippolytus. O mansions, would to Heaven that ye a voice Could utter, and your testimony give, Whether I have transgressed.

Theseus. Hast thou recourse
To witnesses who lack the power of speech?
Beyond all words this deed thy guilt displays.

Hippolytus. In such position as to view my soul
O could I stand, that I might cease to weep
For the calamities I now endure!

Theseus. Thou thine own merits hast much more been wont

To reverence, than with pious awe to treat Thy parents as thy duty doth enjoin.

Hippolytus. Unhappy mother! wretched son! Avert The curse which on a spurious race attends, From those who share my friendship, righteous gods!

Theseus. Will ye not drag him from my sight, ye slaves?

Did you not hear how I long since decreed He shall be banished!

They should rue it soon, Hippolytus. If they presumed to touch me. But yourself

May from these realms expel me if you list.

Theseus. If thou obey not these commands, I will:

For I feel no compassion for thy exile. Exit THESEUS.

Hippolytus. The sentence is, it seems, already passed; Wretch that I am! My doom indeed I know, Yet know not in what language to express The pangs I feel. O thou to me most dear Of all the gods, Latona's virgin daughter, Who dwell'st with me, companion of the chase, Far from illustrious Athens let us fly; I to that city and Erectheus' land Now bid farewell. O thou Trœzenian realm. Fraught with each varied pleasure youth admires, Adieu! I see thee now for the last time, And these last parting words to thee address: Come, O ye youths, my comrades, hither come. Speak kindly to me now, and till we reach The frontiers of this country, on my steps Attend. For ye shall ne'er behold a man More chaste, though such I seem not to my sire.

Exit HIPPOLYTUS.

3-4 St

CHORUS.

ODE.

I. I.

When I reflect on Heaven's just sway, Each anxious thought is driven away; But, ah! too soon, hope's flattering prospect ends, And in this harassed soul despair succeeds, When I compare with human deeds What fate those deeds attends.

At each various period changing, Formed upon no settled plan, In a maze of errors ranging, Veers the precarious life of man.

I. 2.

May the kind gods' paternal care,
Attentive to their votary's prayer,
Grant unalloyed prosperity and wealth,
Let me enjoy, without conspicuous fame,
A character unstained by shame,

With mental ease and health:
Thus exempt from wrinkled sorrow,
Would I ape the circling mode,
Alter my conduct with the morrow,
And snatch each pleasure as it flowed.

II. I.

Now I a heart no longer pure
Against the shocks of fortune can secure,
But feel at length e'en hope itself expire:
Since from the land we see that star, whose light
On Athens shone serenely bright,

Removed by Theseus' ire.

Lament, thick scattered on the shore, ye sands,
Where Treezene's city stands,
And steep mountains, which ascending
With thy hounds to trace the prey,

Thou, Hippolytus, attending Dictynna, the swift hind didst slay.

II. 2.

No longer the Hennetian steeds
Yoked to thy chariot, o'er yon sacred meads
Around the ring, wilt thou expertly guide.
The Muse, whose lyre is doomed to sound no more,
Shall the paternal house deplore,
Bereft of thee its pride.

For Dian's haunts beneath th' embowering shade Now no hand the wreath will braid. Thou art from this region banished, Hence is Hymen's torch decayed: All prospects of thy love are vanished, The rivalry of many a maid.

III.

By thy calamity inspired, With plaintive strains will I bewail thy fate, O wretched mother, who in vain The throes of childbirth didst sustain.

I with indignant hate

Against the gods themselves am fired. Ah, gentle graces, smiling at his birth, Could not you screen by your benignant power Your guiltless votary, in an evil hour Sentenced to wander far from his paternal earth?

The servant of Hippolytus, with looks Which witness grief, I see in haste approach.

MESSENGER, CHORUS.

Messenger. Ye matrons, whither shall I speed my course To find the royal Theseus? If ye know, Inform me; is the monarch here within? Chorus. Forth from the palace he in person comes.

THESEUS, MESSENGER, CHORUS.

Messenger. O Theseus, the intelligence I bring Deserves the serious thoughts of you, and all The citizens who, or in Athens dwell, Or on the borders of Træzene's land.

Theseus. What mean'st thou? Hath some recent woe befallen

These two adjacent cities? Messenger.

In one word. To sum up all, Hippolytus is dead; For he but for a moment views the sun.

Theseus. Say, by what hostile arm the miscreant fell. Did any one, whose wife with brutal force, As late his father's, he defiled, assail him?

Messenger. The fiery coursers who his chariot drew Destroyed him, and the curses you addressed To the stern ruler of the deep, your sire, Against your son.

Theseus.

Thanks, O ye righteous gods; Now, Neptune, hast thou proved thyself my father, Since thou my imprecations hast fulfilled. Inform me how he perished, how the sword Of justice smote the villain who hath wronged me. Messenger. We, near the beach, oft dashed by the hoarse

waves Of ocean, smoothed his generous coursers' manes, Yet weeping. For a messenger arrived With tidings that Hippolytus no more Would to this realm be suffered to return, Sentenced by you to miserable exile. But, to confirm this piteous tale, soon came The banished prince, and joined us on the strand, A numerous group of comrades on his steps Attended. After a long pause, he said, Ceasing his plaints: "Why still should I lament My doom, my father's word must be obeyed: Those steeds, ye servants, harness to the car; Træzene is no longer my abode." Soon as we heard, all hastened: these commands Scarce was there time to issue, when we brought The ready coursers harnessed to their lord: Mounting his chariot then the reins he seized, When he his feet had in strong buskins clad: But first with hands outspread invoked the gods, And cried: "O righteous Jove, here end my life If I have sinned: but let my father know How much he wrongs us, whether we expire Or still behold the light." With lifted thong The rapid courser's onward then he drove; We servants close behind our master's car Followed, along the Epidaurian road, Which leads direct to Argos. But at length, Passing the limits of this realm, we entered A wilderness adjoining to the coast Of the Saronian deep: a dreadful sound Was from the inmost caverns of the earth Sent forth, like Jove's own thunder, while the steeds, Astonished, with their heads and ears erect Towards Heaven, stopped short. An instant terror seized

On all of us; we wondered whence the sound Could issue, till at length, as on the beach We looked, a mighty wave we saw, which reached The skies, and from our view concealed the cliffs Of Sciron, the whole isthmus covered o'er, And Æsculapius' rock, then to a size The most enormous swollen, and pouring forth With loud explosion foam on every side, The tide impelled it onward to the coast Where stood the harnessed steeds; amid the storm And whirlwind's rage the wave disgorged a bull, Ferocious monster, with whose bellowings filled, All earth resounded horribly: our eyes Scarce could endure the sight. With panic fear The steeds were seized that instant: but meantime Their lord, who to the managing them long Had been inured, caught up with both his hands The reins, and drew them tight, as the rude oar A sailor plies; exerting all his strength Then backward leaned, and twisted them around His body: but the raging coursers gnashed Their steely curbs, and scoured along the field Regardless of the hand that steered their course, Or rein or polished car. Along the plain, If he attempted their career to guide, The bull in front appeared, to turn them back And e'en to madness scared: but if they ran Close to the shelving rocks with frantic rage, He, silently approaching, followed hard Behind the chariot; 'gainst a rugged cliff, Till he the wheel directing, had o'erthrown The vehicle. 'Twas dire confusion all: Upward the spokes and shivered axle flew; The hapless youth, entangled in the reins, Confined by an inextricable bond, Was dragged along; against the rock his head With violence was dashed, and his whole body Received full many a wound. These horrid words He uttered with a shriek: "Stop, O my steeds, Nor kill the master in whose stalls ye fed! O dreadful imprecations of my sire! Who is at hand to save a virtuous man?"

Though many wished to rescue him, too late We came. But from the broken reins released, At length, I know not by what means, he fell, In a small portion yet the breath of life Retaining. But the horses, from all eyes, And that accursed monster, were concealed Among the mountains, where I cannot tell. Though I indeed, O king, am in your house A servant, yet I never can be brought To think your son was with such guilt defiled, Though the whole race of women should expire Suspended in the noose, and every pine On Ida's summits were with letters filled; So well am I convinced that he was virtuous.

Chorus. The measure of our recent woes is full:

No means, alas, are left for us to 'scape

The sentence of unalterable fate.

Theseus. From hatred to the man who hath endured
These sufferings I with pleasure heard thy

tale:

But now through a just reverence for the gods, And for that wretch, because he was my son, I from his woes nor joy nor sorrow feel.

Messenger. But whither must we bear the dying youth,
To gratify your wish, or how proceed?
Consider well: but if you would adopt
My counsels, you with harshness would not treat
Your hapless son.

Theseus. The miscreant hither bring;

That I, when face to face I shall behold Him who denies that he my nuptial bed Polluted, may convict him by my words, And these calamities the gods inflict.

Exit Messenger.

Chorus. To yours, O Venus, and your son's control,
Whose glittering pinions speed his flight,
The gods incline their stubborn soul,
And mortals yielding to resistless might.

For, o'er land and stormy main,
Love is borne, who can restrain
By more than magic art
Each furious impulse of the heart:

Savage whelps on mountains bred,
Monsters in the ocean fed,
All who on earth behold the solar ray,
And man, his mild behests obey.
For you, O Venus, you alone
Sit on an unrivalled throne,
By each duteous votary feared,
As a mighty queen revered.

DIANA, THESEUS, CHORUS.

Diana. Thee, sprung from noble Ægeus, I command To listen, for to thee Diana speaks, The daughter of Latona. Why, O Theseus, Do these disastrous tidings fill thy heart With pleasure, when unjustly thou hast slain Thy son, the false assertions of thy consort On no clear proof believing? Yet too clear Is the atrocious guilt thou hast incurred. Covered with shame, why hid'st thou not thy head In gloomy Tartarus, in the realms beneath: Or, this abhorred pollution to escape, On active wings why mount'st thou not the skies? In the society of virtuous men Thou canst not pass the remnant of thy life. Hear me, O Theseus, while I state the ills In which thou art involved: though now to thee It can avail no longer, thy regret Will I excite. The purposes I came for Are these: to show that to thy son belongs An upright heart, how to preserve his fame His life he loses, and that frantic rage Thy consort seized, whose conduct hath in part Been generous: for, with lawless passion stung. By that pernicious goddess, whom myself, And all to whom virginity is dear, Peculiarly abhor, she loved thy son, And while she strove by reason to o'ercome Th' assaults of Venus, unconsenting fell By those vile stratagems her nurse devised, Who to thy son the queen's disease revealed Under the awful sanction of an oath; But he, by justice rendered strong, complied not

With her solicitations, yet no wrongs Which he from thee experienced could provoke The pious youth to violate that faith Which he had sworn to. She meanwhile alarmed. Lest to his father he her guilt should prove, Wrote that deceitful letter, on thy soul Gaining too prompt a credence, and thy son Hath by her baleful artifice destroyed.

Theseus. Ah me!

Diana. Doth what I have already spoken, O Theseus, wound thee? To the sequel lend A patient ear, and thou shalt find just cause To wail yet more. Thou know'st thy sire engaged That thy petitions thrice he would fulfil; And one of these, O thou most impious man, Which might have slain some foe, hast thou employed In the destruction of thy son. Thy father, Who rules the ocean, though to thee a friend, Gave what he promised, by strict honour bound. But thou to him, as well as me, must seem Devoid of worth, who waiting for no oath To be administered, nor till the seers Could utter a response, or length of time Enable thee to search into the truth, Thy curses hast too hastily poured forth Against thy son, and slain him. Awful queen,

Theseus.

Would I were dead! Diana.

Thou hast committed crimes Most horrid; but mayst haply still obtain Heaven's gracious pardon: since at the behest Of Venus these calamitous events Took place to satiate her relentless ire. For 'tis a law among the gods that none Shall thwart another's will; we all renounce Such interference. Else be thou assured Had I not dreaded Jove, into such shame I never would have fall'n, nor suffered him Whom I hold dearest of the human race To perish. As for thy offence, thou first, By ignorance, from malice art absolved; Again, thy consort, the deceased, used words

Of strong persuasion to mislead thy soul.

Now by the mighty conflux of these woes
Thou chiefly art o'erwhelmed: but I, too, grieve.
For in a good man's death the righteous gods
Rejoice not, with their children and their house,
Though we the wicked utterly destroy.

HIPPOLYTUS, DIANA, THESEUS, CHORUS.

Chorus. Here comes the hapless youth, his graceful frame
And auburn locks disfigured. Wretched house!
What twofold woes, through Heaven's supreme behest,
Invade this family!

Hippolytus. How am I rent,

Ah me! through those unrighteous vows pronounced By an unrighteous father! Through my head Shoot dreadful pangs, and strong convulsions rend My tortured brain. Ah me! Lay down to rest This shattered body! Ye accursed steeds, Though fed with my own hand, have ye destroyed And slain your master. Ah, I by the gods Entreat you, softly handle, O my friends, This wounded frame. Who stands there on my right? Carefully raise me up, and bear along With even step a wretch who hath been cursed By his mistaken sire. Jove, righteous Jove, Behold'st thou this? I who devoutly worshipped The gods, and all the human race excelled In chastity, deprived of life am plunged Into the yawning subterraneous realms Of Orcus. Sure I exercised in vain Each pious toil to benefit mankind. My pangs return afresh. Let loose your hold! Come, death, thou best of medicines. Kill me! kill me! O for a sword to pierce my heart, and close In endless slumbers this detested life. How inauspicious was my father's curse! That lingering vengeance which pursues the guilt By my progenitors in ancient days Committed, and my kindred who are stained With recent murders, terminate in me. No longer now suspended. O ye gods, Why do ye punish me who had no share

In those enormities? But in what words
Can I express myself, or how escape
From the oppressive numbness which weighs down
My senses? Would to Heaven the fates who haunt
Pluto's abode, the realm of ancient night,
Would lay me down in everlasting sleep!

Diana. With what calamity, O hapless youth,

Hast thou been yoked! It is thy generous soul

Which hath destroyed thee.

Hippolytus. From celestial lips
How doth a fragrant odour breathe around!
Amid my sufferings thee did I perceive,
The pangs I feel were instantly assuaged.
Diana sure is here.

Diana. Beside thee stands
Thy favourite goddess.

Hippolytus. Dost thou see my woes,

O thou whom I adore?

Diana. These eyes behold
What thou endur'st: but they no tear must shed.
Hippolytus. Thy faithful comrade in the sylvan chase,

Thy votary is no more.

Diana. Alas! no more!

Yet e'en in death to me thou still art dear.

Hippolytus. Nor he who drove thy fiery steeds, and watched

Thy images.

These stratagems, by Venus,

From whom all mischief takes its rise, were planned.

Hippolytus. Too well I know the goddess who destroyed me.

Diana. For her neglected homage much enraged Against thee, to the chaste a constant foe.

Hippolytus. Us three I find her hatred hath undone. Diana. Thy father, thou, and his unhappy wife

Complete that number.

Hippolytus. I bewail my sire.

Diana. Him by her arts that goddess hath misled.

Hippolytus. To you, my father, this event hath proved

A source of woes abundant.

Theseus. O my son,
I perish, and in life have now no joy.

Happolytus. Yet more for you, who have been thus deluded,
Than for myself, I grieve.

Theseus. My son, I gladly

Would die to save thee.

Hippolytus. Fatal gifts of Neptune
Your father.

Theseus. Now most earnestly I wish

These lips had never uttered such a prayer.

Hippolytus. What then? You would have slain me, such your wrath.

Theseus. Because I by the gods was then deprived Of understanding.

Hippolytus. O that in return

Mankind could with their curses blast the gods!

Diana. Be pacified: for in earth's darksome caves,

The rage of Venus who on thee hath wreaked Such horrors for thy pure and virtuous soul I will not suffer unatoned to rest.

For in requital, my vindictive hand With these inevitable darts shall smite The dearest of her votaries. But on thee

These sufferings to reward will I bestow

The greatest honours in Træzene's realm:
For to thy shade, ere jocund Hymen wave

The kindled torch, each nymph her tresses shorn Shall dedicate, and with abundant tears For a long season thy decease bewail.

In their harmonious ditties the chaste choir

Of virgins ever shall record thy fate,

Nor pass unnoticed Phædra's hapless love.

But, O thou son of Ægeus, in those arms
Embrace the dying youth; for 'gainst thy will
Didt thou destroy him. When the gods and si

Didst thou destroy him. When the gods ordain That man should err, he cannot disobey.

This counsel, O Hippolytus, to thee I give; no hatred to thy father bear,

For well thou know'st from whence thy fate arose.

And now farewell! for I am not allowed To view unholy corses of the slain.

Or with the pangs of those who breathe their

Pollute these eyes: too clearly I discern That thou art near the moment of thy death.

[Exit DIANA.

Hippolytus. Farewell, blest virgin, grieve not thus to part From a most faithful votary, who with thee Hath long held converse. With my sire I end All strife at thy behest; for to thy words I still have been obedient. Wretched me! Already thickest darkness overspreads These swimming eyes. My father, in your arms Receive me, and support this sinking frame.

Theseus. How, O my son, dost thou increase my woes! Huppolytus. I perish, and already view the gates

Of von drear realms beneath.

Theseus. But wilt thou leave

My soul polluted?

Hippolytus. No, from the foul crime

You I absolve.

Theseus. What saidst thou? Shall the stain
Of having shed thy blood no longer rest
On me thy murderer?

Hippolytus. Let Diana witness.

Hippolytus. Let Diana witness,
Who with her shafts subdues the savage brood.

Theseus. How generous is this treatment of thy sire.

My dearest son!

Hippolytus. Farewell! a long adieu
I bid to you, my father.

Theseus. Ah, how pious,

How virtuous is thy soul!

Hippolytus. Implore the gods
That all your race legitimate may tread
In the same path.

Theseus. Desert me not, my son:

Take courage.

Hippolytus. It is now, alas! too late,
For, O my sire, I die. Make no delay,
But with this garment cover o'er my face. [He dies.

Theseus. Minerva's fortress, thou Athenian realm,
Of what a virtuous prince art thou deprived!
Ah, wretched me! how oft shall I reflect,
O Venus, on the ills which thou hast caused.

Chorus. On our whole city hath this public loss
Fallen unforeseen. Abundant tears shall flow.
When bleed the mighty, their sad history leaves
A more profound impression on the heart.

ION

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

MERCURY. ION. CHORUS OF CREUSA'S FEMALE ATTENDANTS. CREUSA.

XUTHUS. OLD MAN. SERVANT OF CREUSA. PUTHIAN PRIESTESS.

Scene. - THE VESTIBULE OF APOLLO'S TEMPLE AT DELPHI.

MERCURY

By a celestial dame, was he who bears On brazen shoulders the incumbent load Of yonder starry heaven, where dwell the gods From ancient times, illustrious Atlas, sire To Maia, and from her I, Hermes, spring, The faithful messenger of mighty Jove. Now to this land of Delphi am I come, Where, seated on the centre of the world. His oracles Apollo to mankind Discloses, ever chaunting both events Present and those to come. Of no small note. In Greece, there is a city which derives Its name from Pallas, by her golden spear Distinguished. Phœbus in this realm compressed With amorous violence Erectheus' daughter, Creusa, underneath those craggy rocks North of Minerva's citadel, the kings Of Athens call them Macra. She endured, Without the knowledge of her sire (for such Was the god's will), the burden of her womb: But at the stated time, when in the palace She had brought forth a son, she to that cave, Where she th' embraces of the god hath known, Conveyed and left the child, to death exposed, Lodged in the hollow of an orbed chest, Observant of the customs handed down By her progenitors, and Ericthonius, That earth-born monarch of her native land, Whom Pallas, daughter of imperial Jove, Placing two watchful dragons for his guard, 164

To the three damsels from Agraulos sprung Entrusted. Hence, among Erectheus' race, E'en from those times, an usage hath prevailed Of nurturing, 'midst serpents wrought in gold, Their tender progeny. Creusa left, Wrapt round her infant, whom she thus to death Abandoned, all the ornaments she had. Then this request, on my fraternal love Depending, Phœbus urged: "My brother, go To those blest children of their native soil. The famed Athenians (for full well thou know'st Minerva's city), from the hollow rock Taking this new-born infant, and the chest In which he lies, with fillets swathed around. Convey to my oracular abode, And place him in the entrance of my fane: What still is left undone my care shall add: For know he is my son." I, to confer A kindness on my brother Phœbus, bore The wicker chest away; and, having oped Its cover that the infant might be seen, Just at the threshold of this temple lodged. But when the fiery coursers of the sun Rushed from heaven's eastern gate in swift career, Entering the mansion whence the god deals forth His oracles, a priestess on the child Fixed her indignant eyes, and wondered much What shameless nymph of Delphi could presume By stealth to introduce her spurious brood Into Apollo's house. She was inclined At first to cast him from the sacred threshold; But, by compassion moved, the cruel deed Forbore, and, with paternal love, the god Aided the child, nor from his hallowed mansion Allowed him to be banished: him she took And nurtured, though she knew not from what mother He sprung, or that Apollo was his sire. To both his parents, too, the boy himself Remained a stranger. While he yet was young, Around the blazing altars, whence he fed. Playful he roamed; but after he attained Maturer years, the Delphic citizens

As guardian of the treasures of the god Employed, and found him faithful to his trust: Still in this fane he leads a holy life. Meanwhile Creusa, who the infant bore, Wedded to Xuthus: fortune this event Thus brought to pass; a storm of war burst forth 'Twixt the Athenian race and them who dwell In Chalcis, on Eubœa's stormy coast. In concert with the former having toiled, And joined in the destruction of their foes, A royal bride, Creusa, he obtained, Though not in Athens but Achaia born, The son of Æolus, who sprung from Jove. He and his consort have been childless long, And therefore to these oracles of Phœbus Are come in quest of issue. This event The god hath caused to happen, nor forgets His son, as some suppose; for he on Xuthus, Will, at his entering this prophetic dome, Freely bestow, and call the stripling his; That when he comes to the maternal house. Creusa may acknowledge him she bore. While her amour with Phœbus rests concealed. And this her son obtains th' inheritance Of his maternal ancestors: through Greece Th' immortal father hath decreed his son Shall be called Ion, the illustrious founder Of Asiatic realms. But I must go Among the laurel's shadowy groves, and learn From this young prophet what the fates ordain; For I behold Apollo's son come forth. To hang the branches of the verdant bay Before the portals of the fane. Now first Of all the gods I hail him by his name, The name of Ion which he soon shall bear.

Ion. Now the resplendent chariot of the sun
Shines o'er the earth: from its ethereal fires,
Beneath the veil of sacred night, the stars
Conceal themselves. Parnassus' cloven ridge,
Too steep for human footsteps to ascend,
Receives the lustre of its orient beams,

And through the world reflects them; while the smoke Of fragrant myrrh ascends Apollo's roof: The Delphic priestess on the holy tripod Now takes her seat, and to the listening sons Of Greece, those truths in mystic notes unfolds, With which the gods inspire her labouring breast. But, O ye Delphic ministers of Phœbus. Now to Castalia's silver fount repair. And when ye have performed the due ablutions, Enter the temple; let no word escape Your lips of evil omen, mildly greet Each votary, and expound the oracles In your own native language. But the toils Which I from childhood to the present hour Have exercised, with laureate sprays and wreaths Worn at our high solemnities, to cleanse The vestibule of Phœbus, I repeat, Sprinkling the pavement with these lustral drops, And with my shafts will I repel the flocks Of birds who taint the offerings of the god. For like a friendless orphan, who ne'er knew A mother's or a father's fostering care, In Phœbus' shrine, which nurtured me, I serve

ODE.

I.

In recent verdure ever gay,
Hail, O ye scions of the bay,
Which sweep Apollo's fane;
Cropt from the god's adjacent bowers,
Where rills bedew the vernal flowers,
And with perpetual streams refresh the plain;
The sacred myrtle here is found,
Whose branches o'er the consecrated ground
I wave, as day by day ascends
The sun with rapid wing,
Waking to toil which never ends,
And zealous in the service of my king.
O Pæan, Pæan, from Latona sprung,
Still mayst thou flourish blest and young!

II.

My labours with renown shall meet;
O Phœbus, the prophetic seat
Revering, at thy fane
A joyful minister I stand,
Serving with an officious hand
No mortal, but the blest immortal train.
Nor by these glorious toils opprest
Am I ignobly covetous of rest;
For dread Apollo is my sire;
To him, to him I owe
My being, nurtured in his choir,
And in the fostering god a father know.
O Pæan, Pæan, from Latona sprung,
Still mayst thou flourish blest and young!

But from this painful task will I desist, And with the laurel cease to sweep the ground: Next, from a golden vase, is it my office To pour the waters of Castalia's fount, Sprinkling its lustral drops: for I am free From lust and its pollutions. May I serve Apollo ever thus, or cease to serve him When I some happier fortune shall attain! But, ha! the birds are here, and leave their nests Upon Parnassus: wing not to this dome Your flight, and on the gilded battlements Forbear to perch. My arrows shall transpierce thee, Herald of Jove, O thou, whose hooked beak Subdues the might of all the feathered tribes. But lo! another comes! The swan his course Steers to the altar. Wilt thou not retire Hence with those purple feet? Apollo's lyre, In concert warbling with thy dulcet strains, Shall not redeem thee from my bow: direct Thy passage to the Delian lake—obey. Or streaming blood shall interrupt thy song. But what fresh bird approaches? Would she build Under these pinnacles a nest to hold Her callow brood? Soon shall the whizzing shaft Repel thee. Wilt thou not comply? Where Alpheus Winds through the channeled rocks his passage, go, And rear thy twittering progeny, or dwell Amid the Isthmian groves, that Phœbus' gifts And temples no defilement may receive. For I am loth to take away your lives, Ye wingéd messengers, who to mankind Announce the will of the celestial powers. But I on Phœbus must attend, performing The task assigned me with unwearied zeal, And minister to those who give me food.

CHORUS, ION.

Chorus. 'Tis not in Athens only that the fane
Where duteous homage to the gods is paid,
Or altar for Agyian Phœbus reared
With many a stately column is adorned;
But in these mansions of Latona's son
From those twin deities portrayed there beams
An equal splendour on the dazzled sight,

1st Semichorus. See there Jove's son who with his golden falchion

Slays the Leruæan Hydra! O my friend, Observe him well.

and Semichorus. I do.

1st Semichorus. Another stands

Beside him brandishing a kindled torch.

2nd Semichorus. He whose exploits I on my woof described? 1st Semichorus. The noble Iolaus, who sustained

Alcides' shield, and in those glorious toils
Was the sole partner with the son of JoveHim also mark who on a wingéd steed
Is seated, how with forceful arm he smites
The triple-formed Chimæra breathing fire.

2nd Semichorus. With thee these eyes retrace each varied scene.

1st Semichorus. Look at the giants' conflict with the gods
Depictured on the wall.

2nd Semichorus. There, there, my friends.

1st Semichorus. Behold'st thou her who 'gainst Enceladus
The dreadful Ægis brandishes?

The dreadful Ægis brandisnes rand Semichorus.

I see

Pallas, my goddess.

And the forked flames, 1st Semichorus. With which th' impetuous thunderbolt descends, Hurled from the skies by Jove's unerring arm?

and Semichorus. I see, I see! Its livid flashes smite Mimas the foe, and with his pliant thyrsus Another earth-born monster Bacchus slays.

Chorus. On thee I call, O thou who in this fane Art stationed: is it lawful to advance Into the inmost sanctuary's recess With our feet bare?

This cannot be allowed, Ion.

Ye foreign dames.

Wilt thou not answer me? Chorus. Ion. What information wish ye to receive?

Chorus. Say, is it true that Phœbus' temple stands

On the world's centre? 'Tis with garlands decked Ion. And Gorgons are placed round it.

So fame tells. Chorus.

Ion. If we before these portals have with fire Consumed the salted cates, and wish to know Aught from Apollo, to this altar come; But enter not the temple's dread recess Till sheep are sacrificed.

I comprehend thee; Chorus. Nor will we break the god's established laws. But with the pictures which are here without Amuse our eyes.

Ye may survey them all Ion.

At leisure.

Chorus. Hither have our rulers sent us, The sanctuary of Phœbus to behold.

Ion. Inform me to what household ye belong. Chorus. Minerva's city is the place where dwell Our sovereigns. But lo! she herself appears

To whom the questions thou hast asked relate.

CREUSA, ION, CHORUS.

Ion. Thy countenance, whoe'er thou be, O woman, Proves thou art noble, and of gentle manners: For by their looks we fail not to discern Those of exalted birth. But with amazement, Closing those eyes, thou strik'st me, and with tears Largely bedewing those ingenuous cheeks, Since thou hast seen Apollo's holy fane.

Whence can such wayward grief arise? The sight Of this auspicious sanctuary, which gives Delight to others, causes thee to weep.

Creusa. Stranger, you well may wonder at my tears,
For since I viewed these mansions of the god,
I have been thinking of a past event;
And though myself indeed am here, my soul
Remains at home. O ye unhappy dames!
O most audacious outrages committed
By the immortal gods! To whom for justice
Can we appeal, if, through the wrongs of those
Who rule the world with a despotic power,
We perish?

Ion. What affliction unrevealed

Makes thee despond?

Creusa. None. I have dropped the subject.

What follows I suppress, nor must you seek

To learn aught farther.

Ion. But say, who thou art
Whence cam'st thou, in what region wert thou
born,

And by what name must we distinguish thee? Creusa. Creusa is my name, my sire Erectheus,

In Athens first I drew my vital breath.

Ion. O thou in that famed city who resid'st, And by illustrious parents hast been nurtured, How much do I revere thee!

Creusa. I thus far,
But in nought else, am blest.

I by the gods

Conjure thee, answer, if the world speak truth.

Creusa. What question's this you would propose, O stranger?

I wish to learn.

Ion. Sprung the progenitor
Of thy great father from the teeming earth?

Creusa. Thence Ericthonius; but my noble race
Avails me not.

Ion And did Minerva rear The warrior from the ground?

Creusa. With virgin arms
For she was not his mother.

Ion. Of the child Disposing as in pictures 'tis described?

Creusa. To Cecrops' daughters him she gave for nurture, With strict injunctions never to behold him.

Ion. I hear those virgins oped the wicker chest In which the goddess lodged him.

Creusa. Hence their doom
Was death, and with their gore they stained the

Ion. Let that too pass. But is this rumour true,
Or groundless?

Creusa. What's your question? for with leisure I am not overburdened.

Ion. Did Erectheus,
Thy royal father, sacrifice thy sisters?

Creusa. He feared not in his country's cause to slay
Those virgins.

Ion. By what means didst thou alone Of all thy sisters 'scape?

Creusa. A new-born infant,
I still was in my mother's arms.

Ion. Did earth
Indeed expand her jaws, and swallow up
Thy father?

Creusa. Neptune with his trident smote And slew him.

Ion. Is the spot on which he died Called Macra?

Creusa. For what reason do you ask
This question? To my memory what a scene
Have you recalled!

Ion. Doth not the Pythian god
Revere, and with his radiant beams adorn
That blest abode?

Creusa. Revere! But what have I
To do with that? Ah, would to heaven I ne'er
Had seen the place!

What Phoebus holds most dear?

Creusa.

What Phoebus holds most dear?

Not thus, O stranger;

Though I know somewhat base that has been done Under those caverns.

Jon. What Athenian lord

Received thy plighted hand? No citizen

Creusa. Of Athens; but a sojourner, who came Out of another country.

Ion. Who? He sure Was of some noble lineage?

Xuthus, son Creusa. Of Æolus, who sprung from Tove.

How gained This foreigner the hand of thee, a native?

Creusa. Eubœa is a region on the confines Of Athens.

Ion.

With the briny deep between. Ion. As fame relates.

Creusa. Those bulwarks he laid waste, With Cecrops' race a comrade in the war.

Ion. He thither came perhaps as an ally, And afterwards obtained thee for his bride.

Creusa. In me the dower of battle, and the prize Of his victorious spear, did he receive.

Ion. Alone, or with thy husband, art thou come These oracles to visit?

Creusa. With my lord: But to Trophonius' cavern he is gone.

Ion. As a spectator only, or t'explore The mystic will of Fate?

He hopes to gain Creusa. From him and from Apollo one response.

Ion. Seek ye the general fruit earth's bosom yields, Or children?

We are childless, though full long Creusa.

Have we been wedded. Hast thou never known Ion. The pregnant mother's throes? Art thou then barren?

Creusa. Phœbus well knows I am without a son Ion. O wretched woman, who in all beside

Art prosperous: Fortune here, alas, deserts thee

Creusa. But who are you? How happy do I deem Your mother!

Ion. An attendant on the god
They call me; and, O woman, such I am.
Creusa. Sent from your city as a votive gift,

Or by some master sold?

Ion. I know this only,
That I am called Apollo's.

Creusa. In return,

I too, O stranger, pity your hard fate, Ion. Because I know not either of my parents.

Creusa. Beneath this fane or some more lowly dome Reside you?

Ion. This whole temple of the god Is my abode, here sleep I.

Creusa. While an infant,
Or since you were a stripling, came you hither?

Ion. The persons who appear to know the truth

Assert I was a child.

Creusa. What Delphic nurse Performed a mother's office?

I ne'er clung
To any breast—she reared me.

Creusa. Hapless youth,
Who reared you? How have I discovered woes
Which equal those I suffer!

Ion. Phœbus' priestess, Whom as my real mother I esteem.

Creusa. But how were you supported till you reached Maturer years?

I at the altar fed,

And on the bounty of each casual guest.

Creusa. Whoe'er she was, your mother sure was wretched Ion. Perhaps to me some woman owes her shame.

Creusa. But say, what wealth you have? For you are drest In a becoming garb.

I am adorned
With these rich vestments by the god I serve.

Creusa. Did you make no researches to discover Your parents?

I have not the slightest clue
To guide my steps.

Creusa. Alas, another dame
Like sufferings with your mother hath endured.

Ion. Who! Tell me. Thy assistance wouldst thou give, I should rejoice indeed.

Creusa. She for whose sake I hither came before my lord arrive.

Ion. What are thy wishes in which I can serve thee?

Creusa. I would obtain an oracle from Phœbus

In private.

Ion.

Name it: for of all beside

Will I take charge.

Creusa. Now to my words attend—
Yet shame restrains me.

Ion. Then wilt thou do nothing:

For Shame's a goddess not for action formed.

Creusa. One of my friends informs me that by Phœbus She was embraced.

Ion. A woman by Apollo!

Use not such language, O thou foreign dame.

Creusa. And that without the knowledge of her sire,
She bore the god a son.

Ion. This cannot be; Her modesty forbids her to confess

What mortal wronged her.

Creusa. No; she suffered all
That she complains of, though her tale be wretched.

Ion. In what respect, if by the bonds of love
She to the god was joined?

Creusa. The son she bore

She also did cast forth.

Where is the boy
Who was cast forth, doth he behold the light?

Creusa. None knows; and for this cause would I consult The oracle.

Ion. But if he be no more,

How died he?

Creusa. Much she fears the beasts devoured Her wretched child.

Ion. What proof hath she of this? Creusa. She came where she exposed, and found him

Ion. Did any drops of blood distain the path?

Creusa. None, as she says; although full long she searched Around the field.

Ion. But since that hapless boy

Perished, how long is it?

Creusa. Were he yet living,
His age would be the same with yours.

Ion. The god

Hath wronged her, yet the mother must be wretched. Creusa. Since that hath she produced no other child.

Ion. But what if Phœbus bore away by stealth

His son, and nurtured him?

Creusa. He acts unjustly,

Alone enjoying what to both belongs.

Ion. Ah me! Such fortune bears a close resemblance To my calamity.

Creusa. I make no doubt,
O stranger, but your miserable mother

Wishes for you.

Ion. Revive not piteous thoughts

By me forgotten.

Creusa. I my question cease;
Now finish your reply.

Ion. Art thou aware

In what respect thou hast unwisely spoken? Creusa. Can aught but grief attend that wretched dame?

Ion. How is it probable the god should publish

By an oracular response, the fact He wishes to conceal?

Creusa. If here he sit
Upon his public tripod to which Greece
Hath free access.

Ion. He blushes at the deed;
Of him make no inquiries.

Creusa. The poor sufferer
Bewails her fortunes.

Ion. No presumptuous seer
To thee this mystery will disclose: for Phœbus,
In his own temple with such baseness charged,

• Justly would punish him who should expound To thee the oracle. Depart, O woman; For of th' immortal powers we must not speak With disrespect. This were the utmost pitch Of frenzy should we labour to extort From the unwilling gods those hidden truths

They mean not to disclose, by slaughtered sheep, Before their altars, or the flight of birds. If 'gainst Heaven's will we strive to reach downblessings,

In our possession they become a curse: But what the gods spontaneously confer Is beneficial.

Chorus. In a thousand forms,

A thousand various woes o'erwhelm mankind: But life can scarce afford one happy scene.

Creusa. Elsewhere as well as here art thou unjust To her, O Phœbus, who though absent speaks By me. For thou hast not preserved thy son Whom thou wert bound to save; nor wilt thou answer-His mother's questions, prophet as thou art: That, if he be no more, there may a tomb For him be heaped, or haply, if he live, She may at length behold her dearest child. But now no more of this, if me the god Forbid to ask what most I wish to know. Conceal, O gentle stranger (for I see My lord the noble Xuthus is at hand, Who from the cavern of Trophonius comes), What thou hast heard, lest I incur reproach For thus divulging secrets, and my words, Not as I spoke them, should be blazed abroad: For the condition of our sex is hard, Subject to man's caprice; and virtuous dames, From being mingled with the bad, are hated. Such, such is woman's miserable doom.

XUTHUS, CREUSA, ION, CHORUS.

Xuthus. I to the god begin t' address myself:

Him first I hail; and you my consort next.

Hath my long stay alarmed you?

Creusa.

No: thou com'st
To her who is opprest with anxious thoughts.
Say from Trophonius what response thou bring'st;
Doth hope of issue wait us!

Xuthus. He refused

T' anticipate the prophecies of Phœbus;

All that he said was this: nor I, nor thou,

Ion.

Shall from this temple to our home return Thus destitute of children.

Creusa. Holy mother

Of Phœbus, to our journey grant success; And O may fortune yet have bliss in store

For those on whom thy son erst deigned to smile.

Xuthus. Thy vows shall be accomplished: but what prophet Officiates in this temple of the god?

Ion. I here without am stationed; but within,
O stranger, others near the tripod take
Their seat, from Delphi's noblest citizens
Chosen by lot.

Xuthus. 'Tis we

The utmost of my wishes, and will enter The sanctuary, for here before the temple, I am informed, the oracles in public To foreigners are uttered; on this day (For 'tis a solemn feast) we mean to hear The god's prophetic voice. O woman, take Branches of laurel, and at every altar Offer up vows to the immortal powers, That I from Phœbus' temple may procure This answer, that my wishes shall be crowned With an auspicious progeny.

Creusa. Depend

On their completion: but were Phœbus' self Disposed to make atonement for past wrongs, He now, alas! no longer can to me Entirely be a friend: yet I from him Whate'er he pleases am constrained to take, Because he is a god.

[Exeunt XUTHUS and CREUSA. In mystic words,

Why doth this foreign dame, against our god
Still glance reproaches, through a strong attachment
To her for whom she hither to consult
The oracle is come; or doth she hide
Some circumstance unfit to be disclosed?
But with Erectheus' daughter what concern
Have I, what interest in th' Athenian realm?
I'll go and sprinkle from the golden vase
The lustral waters. Yet must I condemn

Phœbus: what means he? To the ravished maid Unfaithful hath he proved: his son, by stealth Begotten, left neglected to expire. Act thou not thus; but since thou art supreme In majesty, let virtue too be thine. For whosoever of the human race Trangresses, with severity the gods Punish his crimes: then how can it be just For you, whose written laws mankind obey, Yourselves to break them? Though 'twill never be, This supposition will I make, that thou, Neptune, and Jove, who in the heaven bears rule, Should make atonement to mankind for those Whom ye have forcibly deflow'red; your temples Must ye exhaust to pay the fines imposed On your base deeds: for when ye follow pleasure, Heedless of decency, ye act amiss; No longer is it just to speak of men As wicked, if the conduct of the gods We imitate: our censures rather ought To fall on those who such examples give. [Exit ION.

CHORUS.

ODE.

I.

O thou who aid'st the matron's throes, Come Eilithya, for to thee I sue; Minerva next with honours due I hail, who by Prometheus' aid arose In arms refulgent from the front of Jove, Nor knew a mother's fostering love;

Victorious queen, armed with resistless might,

O'er Pythian fanes thy plumage spread, Forsake awhile Olympus' golden bed,

O wing thy rapid flight
To this blest land where Phœbus reigns,
This centre of the world his chosen seat,
Where from his tripod in harmonious strains
Doth he th' unerring prophecy repeat:

With Latona's daughter join,

For thou like her art spotless and divine: Sisters of Phœbus, with persuasive grace, Ye virgins sue, nor sue in vain,

That, from his oracles, Erectheus' race
To the Athenian throne a noble heir may gain.

II.

Object of Heaven's peculiar care
Is he whose children, vigorous from their birth,

Nursed on the foodful lap of earth,
Adorn his mansion and his transports share:

No patrimonial treasures can exceed Theirs who by each heroic deed

Augment the fame of an illustrious sire

And to their children's children leave

Th' invaluable heritage entire.

In troubles we receive
From duteous sons a timely aid,
And social pleasure in our prosperous hours.
The daring youth, in brazen arms arrayed

Guards with protended lance his native towers.

To lure these eyes, though gold were spread,
Though Hymen wantoned on a regal bed,
Such virtuous offspring would my soul prefer.

The lonely childless life I hate,

And deem that they who choose it greatly err, Blest with a teeming couch, I ask no kingly state.

III.

Ye shadowy groves where sportive Pan is seen, Stupendous rocks whose pine-clad summits wave,

Where oft near Macra's darksome cave, Light spectres, o'er the consecrated green,

Agraulos' daughters lead the dance Before the portals of Minerva's fane

To the shrill flute's varied strain.

When from thy caverns, through the vale around,

O Pan, the cheering notes resound.

Under those hanging cliffs (abhorred mischance! Some nymph a son to Phœbus bore,

Whom she to ravenous birds a bloody feast

Exposed, and to each savage beast;
Her shame, her conscious guilt, deplore.
Nor at my loom, nor by the voice of Fame
Have I e'er heard it said,

The base-born issue of some human maid, Begotten by a god, to bliss have any claim.

ION, CHORUS.

Ion. O ye attendants on your noble mistress,
Who watch around the basis of this fane,
Say, whether Xuthus have already left
The tripod and oracular recess,
Or in the temple doth he stay to ask
More questions yet about his childless state?

Chorus. He is within, nor yet hath passed the threshold Of these abodes, O stranger: but we hear The sounding hinges of yon gates announce His coming forth: and see, my lord advances!

Xuthus, Ion, Chorus.

Xuthus. On thee, my son, my every bliss attend:
For such an introduction suits my speech.

Ion. With me all's well: but learn to think aright,
And we shall both be happy.

Xuthus. Give thy hand,

And suffer me t' embrace thee.

Yet unimpaired, or hath the secret curse Some god inflicts, O stranger, made you frantic?

Xuthus. In my right mind am I, if having found
Him whom I hold most dear, I wish t' embrace him.

Ion. Desist, nor touch me, lest your rude hand tear The garlands of the god.

Xuthus. Now in these arms

Thee I have caught, no pledge will I receive;

For I've discovered my belovéd son.

Ion. Wilt thou not leave me, ere these shafts transpierce Your vitals?

Xuthus. But why shun me, now thou know'st
That I to thee by such strong ties am bound?

Ion. Because to me it is no welcome office

Foolish and frantic strangers to recall To their right reason.

Take my life away, Xuthus. And burn my corse; but if thou kill me, thou

Wilt be thy father's murderer. How are you Ion.

My father? Is not this ridiculous?

Xuthus. In a few words to thee would I explain Our near connection.

Ion. What have you to say? Xuthus. I am thy sire, and thou art my own son.

Ion. Who told you this?

Xuthus. Apollo, by whose care

Thou, O my son, wert nurtured in this fane.

Ion. You for yourself bear witness.

Xuthus. Having searched

The oracles of this unerring god-

Ion. Some phrase of dubious import have you heard, Which hath misled you.

Heard I not aright? Xuthus.

Ion. What said Apollo?

Xuthus. That the man who meets me—

Ion. Where?

Xuthus. As I from the temple of the god Am going forth.

What fortunes him await? Ion.

Xuthus. Those of my son.

Ion. By birth or through adoption?

Xuthus. A gift and my own child.

Ion. Am I the first

You light on?

Xuthus. I have met none else, my son. Ion. Whence springs this strange vicissitude of fortune? Xuthus. The same event with wonder strikes us both.

Ion. To you, what mother bore me?

Xuthus. This I know not.

Ion. Did not Apollo say?

Xuthus. I was delighted

With what he had revealed, and searched no farther. Ion. From mother earth I surely sprung.

Xuthus. The ground

Brings forth no children.

Ion. How can I be yours?

Xuthus. I know not; but refer thee to the god. Ion. Some other subject let us now begin.

Xuthus. This is a topic, O my son, to me

Most interesting.

The joys of lawless love Ion.

Have you experienced?

Yes, through youthful folly. Xuthus.

Ion. Ere you were wedded to Erectheus' daughter?

Xuthus. Not ever since.

Ion. Did you beget me then?

Xuthus. The time just tallies.

Ion. But how came I hither?

Xuthus. This quite perplexes.

From a distant land?

Xuthus. In this I also find new cause for doubt. Ion. Did you ascend erewhile the Pythian rock?

Xuthus. To celebrate the festivals of Bacchus.

Ion. But to what host did you repair?

Xuthus. The same Who me with Delphic maids—

Initiated? Ion.

Or what is it you mean?

The Mænades Xuthus

Of Bromius too.

While sober, or o'erpowered Ion.

By wine?

The joys of Bacchus had ensnared me. Xuthus.

Ion. Hence it appears I was begotten then.

Xuthus. Fate hath at length discovered thee, my son. Ion. But to this fane how could I come?

The nymph Xuthus. Perhaps exposed thee.

Ion.

I from servitude Have made a blest escape.

Xuthus.

Now, O my son,

Embrace thy sire.

I ought not to distrust

The god.

Ion.

Thou think'st aright. Xuthus.

And is there aught Ion.

That I can wish for more-

Xuthus. Thou now behold'st

As much as it concerns thee to behold.

Ion. Than from Jove's son to spring?

Xuthus. Which is thy lot.

Ion. May I embrace the author of my birth? Xuthus. To the god yielding credence.

Ion. Hail, my father.

Xuthus. With ecstasy that title I receive.

Ion. This day-

Xuthus. Hath made me happy.

Ion. My dear mother,

Shall I e'er see thee? More than ever now (Be who thou wilt) I for that moment long. But thou perhaps art dead, and I for thee

Can now do nothing.

Chorus. With our monarch's house

We share the glad event: yet could I wish My royal mistress and Erectheus' race

With children had been blest.

Xuthus. The god, my son,

In thy discovery hath done well; to him I owe this happy union. Thou too find'st A father, though thou never knew'st till now By whom thou wert begotten: with thy wishes Mine, O my son, conspire, that thou mayst find Thy mother, and that I may learn who bore thee. By leaving this to time, we may at length Perhaps discover her: but now forsaking Apollo's temple and this exiled state, With duteous zeal accompany thy sire To Athens, where this heritage awaits thee. A prosperous sceptre and abundant wealth: Nor though thou want one parent, can the name. Or of ignoble, or of poor be thine: But for thy noble birth shalt thou be famed. And thy abundant treasures. Art thou silent? Why dost thou fix thine eyes upon the ground? Thy anxious thoughts return, and thou, thus changed From thy past cheerfulness, alarm'st my soul.

Ion. Things at a distance wear not the same semblance
As when on them we fix a closer view.

I certainly with gratitude embrace

My better fortunes, having found in you A father. But whence rose my anxious thoughts Now hear: in Athens, I am told, a native Is deemed a glorious name, not so the race Of aliens. I its gates shall enter laden With these two evils; from a foreign sire Descended, and myself a spurious child. Branded with this reproach, doomed to continue In base obscurity, I shall be called A man of no account: but if intruding Into the highest stations in the city, I aim at being great, I shall incur Hate from the vulgar, for superior power Is to the people odious; but the friends Of virtue, they whose elevated souls With real wisdom are endued, observe A modest silence, nor with eager haste Rush into public business; such as these Will laugh and brand me with an idiot's name, For not remaining quiet in a land Which with tumultuous outrages abounds. Again, will those of a distinguished rank Who at the helm preside, when I attempt To raise myself to honour, be most wary How on an alien they their votes confer, For thus, my sire, 'tis ever wont to be; They who possess authority and rank Loathe their competitors. But when I come, Unwelcome stranger, to a foreign house And to the childless matron—partner once In your calamity, of all her hopes Now reft—with bitter anguish will she feel In private this misfortune: by what means Can I escape her hatred, at your footstool When I am seated, but she, still remaining A childless consort, with malignant eyes The object of your tenderness beholds? Then or, betraying me, will you regard Your wife: or by th' esteem for me exprest, A dire confusion in your palace cause. For men, by female subtlety, how oft Have poisons been invented to destroy;

Yet is my pity to your consort due,
Childless and hastening to the vale of years;
Sprung from heroic sires she ill deserves
To pine through want of issue. But the face
Of empire whom we foolishly commend
Is fair indeed, though in her mansions Grief
Hath fixed her loathed abode. For who

happy, Who fortunate, when his whole life is spent In circumspection and in anxious fears? Rather would I in an ignoble state Live blest, than be a monarch who delights In evil friends, and hates the good, still fearing The stroke of death. Perhaps you will reply That gold can all these obstacles surmount, And to grow rich is sweet. I would not hear Tumultuous sounds, or grievous toils endure, Because these hands my treasures still retain. May I possess an humbler rank exempt From sorrow! O my sire, let me describe The blessings I have here enjoyed; first ease, To man most grateful; by the busy crowd I seldom was molested, from my path No villain drove me: not to be endured Is this, when we to base competitors Are forced to yield pre-eminence. Fervently to the gods, or ministered To mortals, and with those who did rejoice I never grieved. Some strangers I dismissed, But others came. Hence a new object still Did I remain, and each new votary please. What men are bound to wish for, even they Who with reluctance practise what they ought. The laws conspired to aid my natural bent, And in the sight of Phœbus made me just. These things maturely weighing in my breast. I deem my situation here exceeds What Athens can bestow. Allow me then The privilege of living to myself: For 'tis an equal blessing, or to taste The splendid gifts of fortune with delight, Or in an humbler station rest content.

Chorus. Well hast thou spoken: could thy words conduce

To the felicity of those I love!

Xuthus. Cease to speak thus, and learn how to be

happy:

For on the spot where thee I found, my son Will I perform due rites, the social board Crown with a public banquet, and slay victims In celebration of thy natal day, Which with no sacrifice hath yet been graced. But now conducting thee, as if a guest Entered my doors, thee with a splendid feast Will I regale, and to th' Athenian realm Lead thee as one who comes to view the land. Not as my son; because I would not grieve My consort, who is childless, while myself In thee am blest: yet will I seize at length Some happy moment, and on her prevail To let thee wield my sceptre. By the name Of Ion, I accost thee, which best suits Th' event that happened, since, as I came forth From Phœbus' temple, thou didst meet me first. Collecting therefore all thy band of friends, Previous to thy departure from the city Of Delphi, with the victim ox regale them. But I command you, damsels, to conceal What I have said: for if ye to my wife Exit XUTHUS. Disclose it, ye shall die.

Ion.

Then will I go:
Yet is there one thing wanting to complete
My better fortunes: for I cannot live
With comfort, if I find not her who bore me.
If I might yet presume to wish for aught,
O may my mother prove to be a dame
Of Athens, that from her I may inherit
Freedom of speech! For if a stranger come
Into that city pure from foreign mixture,
Although he be a denizen in name,
By servile fear his faltering tongue is tied,
Nor dares he freely utter what he thinks.

Exit ION.

CHORUS.

ODE.

Τ.

I view the tears which from her eyes shall flow
The sorrows that shall rend her breast,
Soon as my queen th' unwelcome truth shall know
That with an heir her lord is blest,
While she forlorn and childless pines.
What priest, O Phœbus, chanted thy decrees?
Who bore this stripling nurtured in thy shrines?

Suspected frauds my soul displease,
Unwonted terrors rend my heart,
While thou to him unfold'st a blest event.
The boy is versed in every treacherous art,
To him her choicest gifts hath fortune lent,
Reared, base-born alien, in a foreign land.
These obvious truths who fails with me to understand?

IT.

Shall we, my friends, to our queen's wounded ear
Without the least disguise relate

How he proves false who to her soul is dear,
Her partner in each change of fate,
That lord in whom her hopes were placed?
But he is happy now, while she descends
Through misery to the vale of years in haste:
Disdained by all his virtuous friends
Shall Xuthus droop, through fortune's power,
To our rich mansions, who stranger came,
Nor duly prized her gift, the royal dower:
Perish the traitor to our honoured dame!
Ne'er may his incense to the gods ascend!
Creusa shall know this. I am our sovereign's friend.

III.

With his new son th' exulting sire
Already to the festive banquet hies,
Where steep Parnassus' hills aspire,
Whose rocky summits touch the skies,
Where Bacchus lifts a blazing pine,
And the gay Mænades to join

His midnight dances haste. With footsteps rude Ne'er may this boy intrude

Into my city: rather may he die, And quit life's radiant morn:

For groaning Athens would with scorn

And jealous eyes the alien view,

Should Xuthus' fraud such cause for scorn supply.

Enough for her that o'er her plain Erst did Erectheus stretch a wide domain, Still be each patriot to his children true.

CREUSA, OLD MAN, CHORUS.

Creusa. Thou venerable man, who didst attend
Erectheus the deceased, my honoured sire,
Now mount the god's oracular abode,
That thou my joys, if Phœbus, mighty king,
The birth of children shall foretell, mayst share.
For surely to be happy with our friends
Is most delightful: but (which Heaven forbid!)
Should any evil happen, to behold
The face of a benignant man is sweet.
For though I am thy queen, as thou didst erst
Honour my father, in that father's stead
I reverence those grey hairs.

Old Man. You still retain

A courtesy of manners, which, O daughter,
Suits your illustrious lineage: you belie not
Those first great ancestors from whom you spring,
Sons of the teeming earth. O lead me, guide
To the prophetic mansion, for to me
Th' ascent is steep: but let thy needful aid
Support me while with aged steps I move.
Creusa. Follow me now, look where thou tread'st.

Creusa. Follow me now, look where thou tread st.

Old Man.

These feet

Indeed are tardy, but my zeal is swift.

Creusa. Lean on thy staff, while up the winding path Thou striv'st to climb.

Ola Man. 'Tis darkness all, my eyesight
So fails me.

Thou speak'st truth, but let not this Make thee dejected.

Old Man. Not with my consent

Thus do I suffer; but on me, though loth, What Heaven inflicts have I no power to heal.

Creusa. Ye faithful females, who have served me long, Attending at the distaff or the loom, What fortunes to my husband were revealed? Left he the temple with a blest assurance Of children, whom t' obtain we hither came? Inform me: for with acceptable tidings If ye can greet me, ye will not confer Such favour on a mistress who distrusts

The truth of what ye utter. Ruthless fate! Chorus.

Creusa. This prelude to your speech is inauspicious.

Chorus. Ah, wretched me! But wherefore am I wounded By oracles that to my lords belong?

No more! Why should I venture to relate

A tale for which my recompense is death? Creusa. What means this plaint, and whence arise your fears? Chorus. Shall we speak out, shall we observe strict silence,

Or how shall we proceed?

Tell what you know Creusa. Of the misfortune which invades your queen.

Chorus. Yes, thou should'st hear it all, though twofold death Awaited me. Ne'er shall those arms sustain, Nor to thy bosom shalt thou ever clasp, The wished-for progeny.

Old Man. Alas, my daughter,

Would I were dead!

Wretch that I am! The woes Creusa. Ye have revealed, my friends, make life a curse.

Old Man. We perish, O my daughter!

Creusa. Grief, alas!

Pierces my vitals.

Old Man. Those untimely groans

Suppress. My plaints unbidden force their way.

Old Man. Before we learn— Creusa. Alas, what farther tidings

Can I expect?

Whether our lord endure Old Man. The same, and share your woes, or you alone To adverse fortune are exposed.

Chorus. On him,
Thou aged man, Apollo hath bestowed

A son; this blessing singly he enjoys
Without his consort.

Creusa. You to me unfold
The greatest of all evils, an affliction

Which claims my groans.

Old Man.

But is the son you speak of
To spring hereafter from some dame unknown,
Or did Apollo's oracle declare

That he is born already?

Chorus.

To thy lord

Phœbus an offspring gives, already born,

Who hath attained the age of blooming manhood:

For I was present.

Creusa. What is this you say?

To me have you related such a tale

As no tongue ought to utter.

Old Man.

Creusa. But by what means, yet undisclosed, the god
This oracle to its completion brings,
Inform me more explicitly, and who

This stripling is.

Chorus. Apollo to thy husband
Gave for a son him whom he first should meet
As from the temple of the god he came.

Creusa. But as for me, alas! through my whole life
Accursed and sentenced to a childless state,
In solitary mansions shall I dwell.
What youth was by the oracle designed?
Whom did the husband of unhappy me
Meet in his passage—how, or where behold him?

Chorus. Know'st thou that stripling, O my dearest queen,
Who swept the temple? He is Xuthus' son.

Creusa. Ah, would to Heaven that I could wing my flight.

Through the dark air beyond the Grecian land To the Hesperian stars! How great, how great Are the afflictions I endure!

Old Man. What name
His father gave him, know you, or is this
Yet undetermined?

Ion was he called, Chorus.

Because he first his happy father met.

Old Man. Who was his mother?

That I cannot tell: Chorus.

But to acquaint thee, O thou aged man,

With all that's in my power, her husband went,

In privacy to offer up a victim

For the discovery, and the natal day Of his new son, and in the hallowed tent With him will celebrate a genial banquet.

Old Man. My honoured mistress (for with you I grieve),

We are betrayed by your perfidious lord, Wronged by premeditated fraud, and cast Forth from Erectheus' house: I speak not this Through hatred to your husband, but because I love you more than him, who wedding you When to the city he a stranger came, Your palace too and whole inheritance With you receiving, on some other dame Appears to have begotten sons by stealth:

How 'twas by stealth I'll prove; when he perceived That you were barren, he was not content

To share the self-same fate, but on a slave,

Whom he embraced in secrecy, begot And to some Delphic matron gave this son,

That in a foreign realm he might be nurtured:

He, to the temple of Apollo sent,

Is here trained up in secret. But the sire, Soon as he knew the stripling had attained The years of manhood, hath on you prevailed

Hither to come, because you had no child. The god indeed hath spoken truth; not so

Xuthus, who from his infancy hath reared The boy, and forged these tales; that, if detected,

His crimes might be imputed to the god: But coming hither, and by length of time

Hoping to screen the fraud, he now resolves He will transfer the sceptre to this stripling, For whom at length he forges the new name

Of Ion, to denote that he went forth And met him. Ah, how do I ever hate

Those wicked men who plot unrighteous deeds,

And then adorn them with delusive art! Rather would I possess a virtuous friend Of mean abilities, than one more wise And profligate. Of all disastrous fates Yours is the worst, who to your house admit Its future lord, whose mother is unknown, A youth selected from th' ignoble crowd. The base-born issue of some female slave. For this had only been a single ill Had he persuaded you, since you are childless, T' adopt, and in your palace lodged the son Of some illustrious dame: but if to you This scheme had been disgustful, from the kindred Of Æolus his sire should he have sought Another consort. Hence is it incumbent On you to execute some great revenge Worthy of woman: with the lifted sword, Or by some stratagem or deadly poison, Your husband and his offspring to dispatch Ere you by them are murdered: you will lose Your life if you delay, for when two foes Meet in one house some mischief must befall, Or this or that. I therefore will with you Partake the danger, and with you conspire To slay that stripling, entering the abode Where for the sumptuous banquet he is making Th' accustomed preparation. While I view The sun, and e'en in death, will I repay The bounty of those lords who nurtured me. For there is one thing only which confers Disgrace on slaves—the name; in all beside No virtuous slave to freeborn spirits yields.

Chorus. I too, O my dear mistress, am resolved
To be the steadfast partner of your fate
And die with glory, or with glory live.

Creusa. How, O my tortured soul, shall I be silent?

But rather how these hidden loves disclose?

Shall I shake off all shame? for what retards

My farther progress? To how dire a struggle

Doth my beleaguered virtue lie exposed?

Hath not my lord betrayed me? For of house

And children too am I deprived. All hopes

Are vanished now of which I fondly sought T' avail myself, but could not, by concealing The loss of my virginity, those throes Concealing which I ever must bewail. But by the starry throne of Jove, the goddess Who haunts my rocks, and by the sacred banks Of Triton's lake, whose waters never fail, I my disgrace no longer will suppress, For, having cleansed my soul from that pollution I shall have shaken off a load of cares. My eyes drop tears, and sorrow rends my soul-Assailed with treachery both by men and gods, Whom I will prove to have been false, devoid Of gratitude to those they loved. O thou, Whose skilful hand attunes the sevenfold chords Of the melodious lyre, from lifeless shells Eliciting the Muses' sweetest strains, Son of Latona, I this day will publish A tale to thee disgraceful: for thou cam'st, Thou cam'st resplendent with thy golden hair, As I the crocus gathered, in my robe Each vivid flower assembling to compose Garlands of fragrance: thou my snowy wrist Didst seize and drag me to the cave, with shrieks While to my mother for her aid I cried: 'Twas impudently done, thou lustful god, To gain the favour of the Cyprian queen. In evil hour, to thee I bore a son, Whom, fearful of my mother's wrath, I cast Into that cave, where thou with wretched me Didst join thyself in luckless love. Now is our miserable son no more, On him have vultures feasted. But meanwhile Thy festive Pæans to the sounding harp Dost thou repeat. O offspring of Latona, To thee I speak, who from thy golden tripod Dost in this centre of the world dispense Thy oracles. My voice shall reach thy ears, O thou false paramour, who, from my lord Though thou no favours ever didst receive. A son into his mansions hast conveyed: Meanwhile the offspring whom to thee I bore

Hath died unnoticed, by the vultures torn; Lost are the bandages in which his mother Had wrapped him. Thee thy Delos doth abhor, The branches of whose laurel rise to meet The palm, and form that shade, where thee her son With arms divine Latona first embraced.

Chorus. Ah me! How inexhaustible a source Of woes is opened, such as must draw tears From every eye.

Old Man.

O daughter, on your face,
Still with unsated rapture do I gaze,
My reason have I lost: for, while I strive
From my o'erburdened spirit to discharge
The waves of woe, fresh torrents at the poop
Rush in and overwhelm me, since the words
Which you have uttered, from your present ills
Digressing to the melancholy track
Of other sufferings. What is it you say?
What charge would you allege against Apollo?
What son is this whom you assert you bore?
And in what quarter of your native city
To beasts did you expose him for a prey?
To me repeat the tale.

Creusa. Thou aged man,
Thy presence makes me blush: yet will I speak.
Old Man. Full well do I know how to sympathise
With my afflicted friends.

Creusa. Then hear my tale.

Thou must remember, on the northern side
Of the Cecropian rock, the cave called Macra.

Old Man. I know it; on that spot Pan's temple stands, And near it blaze his altars.

"Twas the scene

Of my unhappy conflict.

Old Man.

Say, what conflict?

Your history makes me weep.

Creusa. The amorous god

Apollo held me in a forced embrace.

Old Man. Was this, my daughter, then, what I perceived?

Creusa. I know not; but will openly declare

The truth, if thy conjectures light on it.

Old Man. When you in silence wailed some hidden woe?

Creusa. Those evils happened then which I to thee Without disguise reveal.

Old Man. But by what means
Your union with Apollo did you hide?

Creusa. I bore a son—with patience hear me speak,
O venerable man.

Old Man. Where? Who performed
Th' obstetric part? Did you alone endure

The grievous throes of childbirth?

Creusa. All alone

Within that cave where I my honour lost.

Old Man. But where's the boy, that in this childless state

Thou mayst remain no longer?

Creusa. He is dead,

Old man; to beasts was he exposed.

Old Man. How! Dead!

Was Phœbus then so base as not to aid you?

Creusa. No aid he gave: but in the dreary house Of Pluto is our hapless offspring nurtured.

Old Man. But who exposed him? Sure it was not you? Creusa. I in the midnight gloom around him wrapped

A mantle.

Old Man. To th' exposure of your son Was no man privy?

Creusa. I had no accomplice
But secrecy with evil fortune leagued.

Old Man. And how could you endure to leave the child Within that cavern?

Creusa. How? These lips did utter Full many piteous words.

Old Man. The cruelty

Which you here showed was dreadful: but the

Than you was still more cruel.

Creusa. Had you seen
The child stretch forth his suppliant hands to me—
Old Man. Sought he the fostering breast, or to recline

In your maternal arms?

Creusa. Hence torn he suffered From me foul wrong.

Old Man.

But whence could such a thought
Enter your soul as to expose your son?

How can I a mortal

Creusa. Because I hoped Apollo, who begot. Would save him.

Ah, what storms have overwhelmed Old Man. The fortunes of your house!

Creusa. Why, covering up Thy head, thus weep'st thou, O thou aged man?

Old Man. Because I see you and your father wretched. Creusa. Such is the doom of frail mortality:

Nought rests in the same state.

Old Man. But let us dwell No more, O daughter, on the piteous theme.

Creusa. What must I do? The wretched can devise

No wholesome counsel.

On the god who wronged you Old Man. First wreak your vengeance.

O'ercome the potent deities?

Set fire Old Man.

To Phœbus' awful temple.

Fear restrains me. And I endure sufficient woes already.

Old Man. Dare then to do what's feasible, to kill Vour husband.

I revere the nuptial bed, Creusa. For when I first espoused the noble Xuthus, My lord was virtuous.

Slay at least this boy, Old Man. Who is produced your interest to oppose.

Creusa. Ah, by what means? How greatly should I wish This done, if it were possible.

By arming Old Man.

With swords your followers.

I will go: but where Creusa.

Shall this be executed?

In the tent Old Man. Where with banquet he regales his friends.

Creusa. This were a public outrage, and my band Of followers is but weak.

Alas! your courage Old Man. Deserts you: forge yourself some better scheme.

Creusa. I too have schemes both subtle and effective. Old Man. In both will I assist you.

Creusa. Hear me then: Full well thou know'st the history of that war

Waged by earth's brood.

Against the gods I know Old Man.

The giants fought on the Phlægrean plain. Creusa. There earth produced the Gorgon, dreadful monster.

Old Man. To aid her sons in battle, and contend With the immortal powers.

E'en so, and Pallas, Creusa. Daughter of Jove, the virgin goddess, slew This prodigy.

But by what horrid form Old Man.

Was it distinguished?

Creusa. Hissing serpents twined

Around its chest.

Old Man. Is this the tale I heard In days of yore?

That Pallas wears its hide Creusa. To guard her bosom.

Old Man. Which they call the Ægis, The garment of Minerva.

It obtained. Creusa.

This name, amidst the combat of the gods When she advanced.

Old Man.

Destroy your foes? Creusa. Old man, art thou acquainted With Ericthonius, or an utter stranger

But how can this, O daughter,

To his whole history?

Old Man. Him whom earth brought forth, The founder of your race.

Creusa. Minerva gave

To him when newly born-

Old Man. Gave what? You speak

With hesitation.

Creusa. Of the Gorgon's blood Two drops.

Old Man. On mortals what effect have these? Creusa. The one produces death, the other heals

Each malady. Old Man. In what were they contained? Did Pallas to the body of the child Affix them?

Creusa. To his golden bandages:
He gave them to my sire.

Old Man. But when he died,

Did they devolve to you?

Creusa. To me they came,

And them e'en now around my wrists I wear. Old Man. But of what wondrous qualities, O say,

Consists this twofold present of the goddess?

Creusa. That blood which issued from the monster's vein.

Old Man. What is the use of this? and with what virtues

Is it endued?

Creusa. Diseases it repels,
And nourishes man's life.

Old Man. But what effect

Arises from the second drop you speak of? *Creusa*. Inevitable death: for 'tis the venom

Of serpents which around the Gorgon twine.

Old Man. These drops together mingled, do you bring,
Or separate?

Creusa. Separate. For with evil good Ought not to be confounded.

Old Man. You possess, My dearest daughter, all that you can need.

Creusa. By this the boy must die: but to dispatch him Shall be your office.

Old Man. Where and by what means
Can I dispatch him? It is yours to speak,

But mine to execute.

Creusa. When at my house

In Athens he arrives.

Old Man.

In this you speak

Unwisely; for you treat with scorn my counsels.

Creusa. What mean'st thou? Hast thou formed the same suspicions

Which have just entered my misgiving soul?

Old Man. Although this boy you slay not, you will seem.
To have contrived his death.
'Tis well observed:

For every tongue asserts that stepdames envy
Their husband's children.

Old Man. Kill him, therefore, here;

You then will be enabled to deny That by your means he perished.

Creusa. Ere it comes,

I that blest hour anticipate.

Old Man. Your husband

Will you deceive e'en in that very point In which he strives t' o'erreach you.

Creusa. Know'st thou then

How to proceed? This ancient golden vase Wrought by Minerva, at my hand receiving, Go where my lord in secret offers up His victims; when the banquet is concluded, And they prepare to pour forth to the gods The rich libation, by thy robe concealed Infuse into the goblet of the youth Its venomous contents; for him alone, Who in my house hereafter hopes to reign, A separate draught, but not designed for all. Should he once swallow this, he ne'er will reach The famed Athenian gates, but here remain A breathless corse.

Old Man. This mansion, for the purpose

Of public hospitality designed,
Now enter: I meanwhile will execute
The business I'm employed in. Aged feet
Grow young again by action, though past time
Can ne'er be measured back. Attend, my queen!
Bear me to him I hate, aid me to slay
And drag him forth from the polluted temple!
For in their prosperous fortunes men are bound
To be religious; but no law obstructs
His progress who resolves to smite his foes.

esolves to smite his foes.

[Exeunt Creusa and Old Man.

CHORUS.

ODE.

I. I.

O Trivia, Ceres' daughter, who presid'st O'er the nocturnal passenger, And him by day who travels; if thou guid'st Th' envenomed cup, it shall not err
Before it reach the destined lip
Of him to whom my venerable queen
Sends the Gorgon's blood to sip,
Who treacherously intruding would debase
Her ancestors' imperial race.
No alien's brood in Athens shall be seen;
The city where Erectheus filled the throne
Shall still be ruled by his posterity alone.

I. 2.

But if in vain to slay the foe she tries,
Should fortune too desert my queen,
And hope which now promotes the bold emprise;
The biting falchion's edge I ween,
Or, twined around her neck, the noose,
Will finish these accumulated woes.
Then the flitting spirit, loose
From earthly gyves, in other forms shall live.
For she will never tamely give
Consent, that he, to foreign realms who owes
His birth, shall seize the palace of her sires:
Hence from her vivid eyes thick flash indignant fires.

II. I.

Shame for that injured god I feel To whom the muse awakes her varied strain, Intruding with officious zeal, Around Callichore's famed spring, On the moon's twentieth eve, should he profane The kindled torches, and his tribute bring, A sleepless votary, mingling with his train, When in the dance the starry sky Of Jove, with the resplendent moon, unites, And fifty maids, the progeny Of Nereus, sport midst ocean's rapid tide, Or where exhaustless rivers glide, To Proserpine and Cere's mystic rites Yielding due homage: from the Delphic fane, Yet there this vagrant hopes to reign, And satiate his rapacious soul's desire With wealth, which others' toils acquire.

II. 2.

Ye bards who crowd each hostile page
With tales of wives beguiled by lawless love,
And war with feeble woman wage,
View with impartial eye our deeds.

View with impartial eye our deeds, And listen for a moment while I prove How greatly female chastity exceeds

Man, whom unbridled passions prompt to rove.

Oft have rude songs profaned our name,

Now let the muse man's haughty sex assail,

And publish deeds replete with shame. For he who from Jove's sons derives his birth

Is void of gratitude and worth,

Nought could the throne his consort gave avail To make the nuptial bed his scene of joy:

He hath obtained this spurious boy,

By the seducing wiles of Venus led To some ignoble damsel's bed.

SERVANT, CHORUS.

Servant. Where, O ye noble matrons, shall I find
My queen, Erectheus' daughter? For in quest
Of her through the whole city have I ranged,
But cannot meet with her.

Chorus. O thou who tend'st
On the same lords with me, what fresh event
Hath happened—wherefore mov'st thou with such
speed?

And what important tidings dost thou bring?

Servant. We are pursued: the rulers of this land

Search after her, resolved that she shall die,

Thrown headlong from the rock.

Chorus. Ah me! what sayst thou?

Could we not then conceal our scheme of slaying

The boy?

Servant. We are detected, and her danger
Is now most imminent.

Chorus.

But by what means
Were these our hidden stratagems brought forth
To public view?

Servant. The god hath found injustice

Too weak to cope with justice, nor allows His shrine to be polluted.

Chorus.

I entreat thee Say how this happened: for when we have heard Whether our doom be death, we shall die gladly, Or, if we live, with pleasure view the sun.

Servant. When from the god's oracular abode With his new son Creusa's husband went To hold a feast, and for th' immortal powers Prepared oblations, Xuthus sought the hill Whence Bacchus' flames burst forth, that he might sprinkle

Parnassus' cloven summit with the blood Of slaughtered victims, celebrating thus The blest discovery of his long-lost son, Whom thus the sire accosted: "Here remain. And bid the builders labour to erect Such tent as shall enclose an ample space On every side: but when I to those gods Who bless the natal hour have sacrificed. If I stay long, before thy friends who here Are present, place the genial feast." Then taking The heifers, he departed. But the youth, Attentive to his pious task, on columns Erected the light roof, to which no walls Lent their support; he guarded it with care, Both from the flaming sun's meridian rays, And from the western aspect; then the sides An acre each in length did he extend, With equal angles; in the central space Was there an area, each of the four sides Its length extended to six hundred feet, A perfect square, which skilful artists say Was calculated well to entertain All Delphi at the feast; the sacred tapestry Then taking from the treasures of the god, He covered o'er the whole—a wondrous sight To all beholders. First he o'er the roof Threw robes, which Hercules, the son of Jove, To Phœbus at his temple brought, the spoils Of vanquished Amazons, a votive gift, On which these pictures by the loom were wrought: Heaven, in its vast circumference all the stars Assembling; there his coursers, too, the sun Impetuous drove, till ceased his waning flame, And with him drew in his resplendent train Vesper's clear light; but, clad in sable garb, Night hastened onward, with her chariot drawn By steeds unyoked; the stars accompanied Their goddess; through mid-air the Pleiades, And, with his falchion, armed Orion moved; But placed on high, around the Northern Pole, The Bear, in an averted posture, turned; Then full-orbed Cynthia, who the months divides, Darted her splendour from the realms above; Next came the Hyades, a sign well known To sailors, and Aurora's dawning light, The stars dispelling. But the sides he covered With yet more tapestry: the Barbaric fleet To that of Greece opposed was there displayed: Followed a monstrous brood, half horse, half man, The Thracian monarch's furious steeds subdued, And lion of Nemæa; at the gate Close to his daughters Cecrops rolled along On scaly folds; this was a votive gift From some Athenian citizen unknown. He in the centre of the festive board Placed golden cups. An aged herald went On tiptoe, and each citizen of Delphi Invited to attend the sumptuous feast. They, crowned with garlands, when the tent was filled. Indulged their genius. After the delight Of the repast was o'er, an aged man, Into the midst advancing, took his stand, And from the guests by his officious zeal Provoked abundant laughter: from huge urns He poured the water forth to lave their hands. And scattered all around from blazing myrrh A rich perfume, over the golden cups Presiding, and assuming to himself That office. But at length, when the shrill pipe Uttered its notes harmonious, and the wine Again went round, the jovial veteran cried: "These smaller cups remove, and in their stead

Large goblets bring, that all may cheer their souls More expeditiously." Then toiled the servants Beneath the silver vessels which they bore. And golden beakers by the sculptor wrought: But he, selecting one of choicest mould, As if he only meant to show respect To his young lord, presented it filled high Up to the brim, infusing midst the wine A deadly poison, which 'tis said his queen Gave him, that the new offspring of her lord Might perish, but without its being known To any man what caused the stripling's death. While he, whom Xuthus has declared his son, Surrounded by his comrades, in his hands Held the libation, some reproachful word Was uttered by a servant, which the youth, Who had received his nurture in the fane And midst experienced prophets, thought an omen Most unpropitious, and another goblet Commanded to be filled: but, on the ground, As a libation to the Delphic god, Poured forth the first, and bade his comrades follow Th' example which he gave. A general silence Succeeded: we the holy goblets filled With water and with Biblian wine. While thus We were employed, there flew into the tent A flock of doves (for they beneath the roof Of Phœbus dwell secure); but of the wine When they had tasted, after they had dipped Their beaks, which thirsted for the luscious draught, And the rich beverage down their feathered throats Ouaffed eagerly, innoxious did it prove To all beside, but she, who on the spot Had settled where the new-discovered stripling Poured his libation down, no sooner tasted The liquor, than she shook her wings, cried out With a shrill plaintive voice, and, groaning, uttered Notes unintelligible. Every guest The struggles of the dove amazed; she died Torn with convulsions, and her purple feet Now loosed their hold. But at the social board, He whom the oracle declared the son

Of Xuthus, rent his garments, bared his breast, And cried, "What miscreant strove to slay me.

Speak, Old man, for this officious zeal was thine, And from thy hand the goblet I received." Then with impetuous grasp his aged arm He caught, and questioned him, that in the fact Of bearing venomed drugs he might detect him. Hence was the truth laid open; through constraint, At length did he reluctantly declare Creusa's guilt, and how her heart contrived The scheme of minist'ring th' envenomed draught. Forth from the banquet with his comrades rushed The youth, whom Phœbus' oracles pronounced To be the son of Xuthus. Standing up Among the Pythian nobles, thus he spoke: "O sacred land, the daughter of Erectheus, A foreign dame, would take away my life By poison." Delphi's rulers have decreed My queen shall be thrown headlong from the rock, Nor hath one single voice, but the consent Of all, adjudged her death, because she strove, E'en in the temple, to have slain the priest. Pursued by the whole city, hither bend Her inauspicious steps. She through a wish For children to Apollo came: but now She perishes with all her hoped-for race.

Exit SERVANT.

Chorus. No means are left for wretched me The ruthless hand of death to 'scape;

For all too plainly see,

Mixt with the purple juices of the grape, The baleful drops of viper's blood:

The baleful drops of viper's blood: 'Tis manifest what victims were designed

To cross the dreary Stygian flood. My life is doomed to close in woe,

At me huge rocky fragments will they throw.

How, O my royal mistress, shall I find Pinions to speed my rapid flight?

How shall I penetrate earth's inmost womb, And in the realms of night

Avoid this miserable doom;

Avoid the stones which vengeance hurls around, When at our heads she aims the wound? Shall I the fleetest steed ascend,

Or the tall prow which cleaves the billowy main?
No heart can hide so foul a stain,

The heart can finde so four a stain,

Unless some god his sheltering aid extend.

How sorely, O my wretched queen,

Will thy tortured spirit grieve!

And shall not we, who have been seen

Striving to work another's bane,

The woes we would inflict, receive,

As justice doth ordain?

CREUSA, CHORUS.

Creusa. My faithful followers, they pursue my flight, Resolved to slay me; by the public vote Of all the Pythian citizens condemned, I shall be yielded up.

Chorus. We are no strangers
To thy calamities; mayst thou escape,
Favoured by fortune!

Creusa. Whither shall I fly?

These feet were hardly swift enough t' outstrip, Impending death: but from my foes escaped, By stealth I come.

Chorus. What shelter canst thou need More than these altars furnish?

Creusa. How can they

Creusa.

Avail me?

Chorus. 'Tis unlawful to destroy

The suppliant.

Creusa. But the law hath sentenced me
To perish.

Chorus. Had'st thou by their hands been caught.

Creusa. But the relentless ministers of vengeance,
Armed with drawn swords, haste hither.

Chorus. Take thy seat

Close to the altar, for if there thou die, Thy blood will on thy murderers fix a stain That ne'er can be effaced. But we with patience Are bound to suffer what the Fates inflict. ION, CREUSA, CHORUS.

Ion. Cephisus, O thou awful sire, who bear'st The semblance of a bull, what viper's this Thou hast begotten, or what dragon darting Flames most consuming from her murderous eyes! She with unbounded boldness is endued, And pestilent as those envenomed drops Of Gorgon's blood with which she sought to kill me. Seize her! Parnassus' rocks shall tear away The graceful ringlets of her streaming hair, When headlong from its summit she is thrown. Me hath propitious fortune here detained, Else to th' Athenian city had I gone, And fallen into a cruel step-dame's snares, But while I yet among my friends remain, Thy heart have I explored, how great a pest And foe thou art to me, for at thy doors Hadst thou received me, thou to Pluto's realm Would'st instantly have hurled me down. The sorceress, what a complicated scene Of treachery hath she framed, yet trembles not The altar of Apollo to approach, As if Heaven's vengeance could not reach her crimes. But neither shall this altar nor the temple Of Phœbus save thy life: for the compassion Thou wouldst excite is rather due to me And to my mother; for although, in person, She be not here, yet is that much-loved name Ne'er absent from my thoughts.

Creusa. To spare my life
In my own name I warn you, and in that

Of the vindictive god before whose altar We stand.

Ion. But what hast thou to do with Phœbus?
Creusa. Myself I to the Delphic god devote.
Ion. Though thou his priest by poison wouldst have slain.
Creusa. Phœbus in you had at that time no right,
Because you were your father's.

I was once

Apollo's, and still call myself his son.

Creusa. To him indeed you formerly belonged,

But now am I his votary, and no claim Have you to such a title.

Ion. Thy behaviour Is impious, mine was pious erst.

Creusa. I sought

To take away the life of you, a foe To me and to my house.

Ion. Did I with arms

Invade thy country?

Creusa. Yes, and you have fired The mansions of Erectheus.

Ion. With what brands,

What flames?

Creusa. You in my palace would have dwelt, Seizing it 'gainst my will.

Ion. My sire bestowing
On me the realm his valour had obtained

Creusa. But by what claim rule Æolus' race Over Minerva's city?

Ion. With his sword He rescued it, and not with empty words.

Creusa. He was but an ally, nor was that land His proper residence.

Ion. Through the mere dread

Of what might happen, wouldst thou then have slain

me?

Creusa. Lest I should perish if your life were spared.

Ion. With envy art thou stung, because my sire

Discovered me, while thou remain'st yet childless.

Creusa. Would you invade the childless matron's house? Ion. But have not I some title to a share

Of my sire's wealth?

Creusa. A shield and spear are all Your father had, and all that you can claim.

Ion. Leave Phoebus' altar and this hallowed seat.

Creusa. Where'er she dwell, to your own mother give Such admonitions.

Ion. Shalt thou 'scape unpunished For thy attempt to slay me?

Creusa. If you mean

To take away my life, let it be here Within this temple.

What delight to thee Ion. Can it afford, amid the votive wreaths Of Phœbus to expire?

I shall afflict Creusa. One by whom I have greatly been afflicted.

Ion. Oh! 'tis most wondrous how, for man t' observe, The deity such laws as are not good Or prudent hath enacted. For th' unjust Before their altars ought to find no seat, But thence to be expelled; for 'tis not fit The statues of the gods by impious hands Should be profaned; but every virtuous man Who is oppressed ought to find shelter there. Yet is it most unseemly for the just And the unjust, when here they meet together, T' experience the same treatment from the gods.

Pythian Priestess, Ion, Creusa, Chorus.

Pythian Pr. Refrain thy rage, my son; for I the priestess Of Phœbus, who the tripod's ancient rites Maintain, selected from the Delphic maids. Leave his oracular abode and pass This consecrated threshold.

Ion. Hail, dear mother.

Although you bore me not.

Pythian Pr. Yet call me such.

That name is not ungrateful.

Have you heard Ion. The stratagems she formed to murder me?

Pythian Pr. I heard them; and thou also hast transgressed Through cruelty.

Ton. How? Can it be unjust.

Those who would slay me, to reward with death?

Pythian Pr. Wives with inveterate hatred ever view Their husbands' sons sprung from another bed.

Ion. And we who have by them been greatly wronged, Abhor those step-dames.

Pythian Pr. Banish from thy soul This rancour, now the temple thou art leaving, And on thy journey to thy native land.

Ion. How then would you advise me to proceed?

In this, thee erst

Pythian Pr. Go unpolluted to th' Athenian realm With prosperous omens.

Ion. Sure the man who slays

His foes is unpolluted.

Pythian Pr. Act not thus:

But with attentive ear receive my counsels.

Ion. O speak: for your benevolence to me Will dictate all you utter.

Pythian Pr. Dost thou see

The chest beneath my arm?

Ion. An ancient chest,
With garlands decked, I see.

Pythian Pr.

A new-born infant, I received.

Non.

What mean you?

A fresh discovery opens.

Pythian Pr. I have kept

These tokens secret; but display them now. Ion. How could you hide them such a length of time

As since you took me up?

Pythian Pr. The god required
Thy service in his temple.

Ion. Doth he now

No longer need it? Who this doubt will solve?

Pythian Pr. By pointing out thy sire, he from these realms
Dismisses thee.

Ion. But is it by command,

Or from what motive, that this chest you keep?

Pythian Pr. Apollo's self inspired me with the thought—

Ion. Of doing what? O speak! Conclude your tale.

Pythian Pr. With care preserving to the present time

What I had found.

Ion. But how can this to me

Cause either gain or damage?

Pythian Pr. Know'st thou not,
That round thee close these fillets were entwined?

Ion. What you produce may aid me in th' attempt

To find my mother.

Pythian Pr. With the god's consent, Which he did erst withhold.

Ion. O day, that bring'st
Blest visions to delight these wondering eyes!

Pythian Pr. Observe these hints, and diligently search
For her who bore thee: traversing all Asia,
And Europe's farthest limits, thou shalt know
The truth of what I speak. Thee, O my son,
I nurtured, through a reverence for the god,
And here surrender to thy hands the pledges
Which 'twas his will I should receive and keep,
Though not commanded: but I cannot tell
What motive swayed him. For, that I possessed
These tokens, was by no man known, or where
They were concealed. Farewell, my love for thee
Is equal to a mother's. With these questions
Thou shouldst commence thy search for her who
bore thee;

First, whether she was any nymph of Delphi, Who thee, the burden of her womb, exposed Here in this fane; but be thy next inquiry, If any Grecian dame. For thou deriv'st All the advantages thou hast, from me, And from Apollo, who in this event

Hath been concerned.

Ion.

Alas! what plenteous tears Steal from these eyes, while shuddering I revolve How she who bore me, having erst indulged A secret passion, did by stealth expose, Nor at her breast sustain me: but unknown I in the temple of Apollo led A servile life. The god indeed was kind, But fortune harsh: for at the very time When in maternal arms I should have sported, And tasted somewhat of the joys of life, I of my dearest mother's fostering care Was cruelly deprived. She from whose womb I sprung is wretched too; she hath endured The self-same pangs with me, and lost the bliss She might have hoped for from the son she bore. But now this ancient coffer will I take And carry for a present to the god; O may I hence discover nought to blast My wishes! For if haply she who bore me Should prove some slave, it were a greater evil To find my mother than to let her rest

In silence. I this votive gift, O Phœbus,
Lodge in thy fane. But what presumptuous deed!
Oppose I the benignant god who saved
These tokens to assist me in discovering
My mother? I am bound to ope the lid,
And act with courage: for what fate ordains
I ne'er can supersede. Why were ye hidden
From me, O sacred wreaths and bandages
In which I was preserved? This orbéd chest,
Behold, how by some counsel of the god
It hath been freed from the effects of age;
Still is its wicker substance undecayed,
Although the time which intervened was long
For such a store to last.

Creusa. Ah me! What vision

Most unexpected do I see?

Chorus. Thou oft
Didst heretofore know when thou shouldst be silent.

Creusa. My situation now no more admits

Of silence: cease these counsels; for I view
The chest in which I, O my son, exposed you,
While yet a tender infant, in the cave
Of Cecrops midst th' encircling rocks of Macra.
I therefore from this altar will depart,
Though death should be the consequence.

Ion. O seize her;
For she, with frenzy smitten by the god,

Leaps from the hallowed altar: bind her arms. Creusa. The execution of your bloody purpose
Suspend not: for this chest, and you, and all

The hidden relics it contains of yours, My son, will I hold fast.

Ion.

Are not these arts

Most dreadful? With what specious words e'en

now

She claims me for a pledge!

Creusa. Not thus: but you,
Whom they hold dear, are by your friends discovered.

Ion. Am I a friend of thine, and yet in secret
Wouldst thou have murdered me?

Creusa. Yea, and my son;

A name to both thy parents ever dear.

Ion. Cease to contrive these fraudful stratagems;

For I will clearly prove that thou art guilty.

Creusa. Ah, would to Heaven that I could reach the mark
At which I aim my shaft!

Is that chest empty,

Or filled with hidden stores?

Creusa. Here are the garment

In which I erst exposed you.

What name they bear before thine eyes behold them?

Creusa. If I aright describe them not, to die Will I be nothing loth.

Ion. Speak; for thy boldness
Is somewhat wonderful.

Creusa. Observe the robe Which erst I wove, when yet maid.

Ion. What sort
Of garment is it? for the virgins' loom
Produces various woofs.

Creusa. Not yet complete;

The sketch bespeaks a learner.

In what form,

That here thou mayst not take me unawares? Creusa. The Gorgon fills the centre of that vest.

Ion. O Jove, what fate pursues me!

Creusa. And the margin
With serpents is encompassed like the Ægis.

Ion. Lo! this is the same garment. We have made
Such a complete discovery as resembles
The oracles of Heaven.

Creusa. O woof which erst

My virgin-shuttle wrought.

Ion. Canst thou produce
Aught else, or in this evidence alone

Art thou successful?

Creusa. In a style antique
Dragons with golden cheeks, Minerva's gift,
Who bids us rear our children 'mong such forms,
In imitation of our ancestor
Great Ericthonius.

Ion. What is their effect,

Or what can be their use? To me explain These golden ornaments.

Creusa. Them, O my son,
Around his neck the new-born child should wear.

Ion. Here are the dragons: but I wish to know What's the third sign.

Creusa. Then round your brow I placed
A garland of that olive which first grew
On Pallas' rock; this, if it still be here.

On Pallas' rock; this, if it still be here, Hath not yet lost the verdure of its leaves, But flourishes unwithered like the tree From which 'twas taken.

With what delight do I behold thy face!
And on those cheeks with what delight imprint

The kiss of filial rapture!

Creusa.

O my son,

Who in a mother's partial eyes outshine

The splendour of Hyperion (for the god

Will pardon me), I clasp you in these arms

Found unexpectedly, you whom I thought

To have been plunged beneath the silent grave,

And dwelt with Prosperine.

Ion.

O my dear mother, thy fond arms around me,
To thee I seem like one who hath been dead

And is restored to life.

Creusa. Thou wide expanse
Of radiant ether, in what grateful tone
Shall I express myself? By clamorous shouts?
Whence hath such unexpected pleasure reached

To whom am I indebted for this joy?

Ion. Sooner could I have looked for aught, O mother, Happening to me, than the discovery made In this auspicious hour, that I am thine.

Creusa. With fear I tremble yet lest thou should'st lose—

Ion. The son who meets thy fond embrace?

Creusa. Such hopes

I from my soul had banished. Whence, O woman, Didst thou with fostering arms receive my child? By whom to Phœbus' temple was he borne?

Ion. 'Twas the god's doing. But may prosperous fortune
Be ours through the remainder of our lives,
Which have been wretched hitherto.

Creusa. My son,
Not without tears were you brought forth; your mother

'Midst bitter lamentations from her arms
Cast you to earth: but now, while to your cheeks
I press my lips, again I breathe, I taste

The most ecstatic pleasures.

Ion. What thou sayst

May to us both with justice be applied.

Creusa. No longer am I left without an heir,
No longer childless; my paternal house
Acquires new strength, and the Athenian realm
Hath yet its native monarchs. E'en Erectheus
Grows young again, nor shall our earth-born race
Be covered with the shades of night, but view

The sun's resplendent beams.

But, O my mother, Since my sire too is present, let him share

The transports I to thee have given.

Creusa. What words

Are these which you have uttered, O my son?

You. Who proves to be the author of my birth.

Creusa. Why speak of this? For from another sire You spring, and not from Xuthus.

Ion.

Me, alas!

In thy unwedded state, a spurious child,

Thou then didst bear.

Creusa. Nor yet had Hymen waved
For me his torch, or led the choral dance,
When, O my dearest son, for you I felt
A mother's throes.

Ion. From what ignoble race Am I descended?

Creusa. Witness she who slew

The Gorgon.

Ion. Ha! What mean'st thou by these words? Creusa. Who on my rocks, whence with spontaneous shoot

The fragrant olive springs, my native hills, Fixes her seat.

To me thou speak'st so darkly,

That what thou mean'st I cannot comprehend. Creusa. Beneath the rock where her harmonious lays

The nightingale attunes, I by Apollo—

Ion. Why dost thou name Apollo?

Creusa. Was embraced

In secrecy—

Ion.

Ton.

Ion.

Speak on; for fair renown, And prosperous fortune, will to me accrue

From the event which thou relat'st.

Creusa. To Phœbus, While in its orbit the tenth moon revolved,

I bore a son, whom I concealed.

Ion. Most grateful Are these strange tidings, if thou utter truth.

Creusa. The fillets which I erst, while yet a maid,
Wove with my shuttle I around you twined;
But you ne'er clung to this maternal breast;
Nor did these hands for you the laver hold,
But in a desert cavern were you thrown
To perish, torn by the remorseless beaks
Of hungry vultures.

What a horrid deed

Was this, in thee, O mother!

Creusa. By my fears
Held fast in bondage, O my son, your life
I would have cast away—would then, though loth,

Have murdered you.

Thou too didst scarce escape

From being slain by my unholy rage.

Creusa. Such were my wretched fortunes then, and such The apprehensions which I felt. Now here, Now there, we by calamity are whirled, Then sport anew in prosperous fortune's gales Which often veer; but may they fix at last! May what I have endured suffice! But now, My son, doth a propitious breeze succeed The tempest of our woes.

Chorus. Let no man think
Aught wonderful that happens, when compared

With these events.

O fortune, who hast wrought

Ion.

A change in countless multitudes, whom first Thou hast made wretched, and then blest anew; What an important crisis of my life Is this which I have reached, and been exposed To dangers imminent, of slaving her Who bore me, and enduring such a death As I deserved not! While we view the sun Perform his bright career, fresh truths like these Each day lie open for the world to learn. My mother (blest discovery!), thee I find, Nor have I any reason to complain Of being sprung from an ignoble sire. But I would tell the rest to thee alone: Come hither; let me whisper in thine ear, And over these transactions cast a veil Of darkness. Recollect, if at the time When thou thy virgin purity didst forfeit Thou wert not by some secret paramour Betrayed, and afterwards induced to charge The god with having ruined thee; my scorn Endeavouring to avoid, by the assertion That Phœbus is my father, though by him Thou wert not pregnant.

Creusa.

No, by her who fought,
Borne in a car sublime, for thundering Jove
Against the giant's earth-born race, Minerva,
Victorious goddess, by no mortal sire

Were you, my son, begotten, but by him Who nurtured you, Apollo, mighty king. *Ion.* What motive, then, had he for yielding up

His offspring to another sire, pretending

That I am Xuthus' son?

Creusa. The god asserts not
That Xuthus was the author of your birth,
But you, his offspring, doth on him bestow.
For to a friend a friend may give his son
T' inherit his possessions.

Ion. O my mother,
An anxious doubt, whether the god speak truth,
Or utter a fallacious oracle,

Is cause sufficient to disturb my soul.

Creusa. Hear then, my son, what thoughts to me occur:

Your benefactor Phœbus places you
In an illustrious house; but were you called
The offspring of the god, you would receive
For your inheritance nor wide domains
Nor aught of rank paternal. For from him
With whom my luckless union I concealed,
And secretly attempted to have slain you,
How could you look for aught? But he, promoting
Your interest, to another sire consigns you.

Ion. I cannot rashly credit tales like these.

I cannot rashly credit tales like these.
But I will go into the fane, and ask
Apollo, whether from a mortal sire
I spring, or whether I am Phœbus' son.
Ha! Who is that, who on the pinnacles
Of this high dome ascending, like the sun,
Displays her front celestial? Let us fly,
My mother, lest perchance we view the gods
When we are not permitted to behold them.

MINERVA, ION, CREUSA, CHORUS.

Minerva. O stay, for 'tis from me you fly, who bear To you no hate, but in th' Athenian realm And here am equally your friend: I, Pallas, From whom your native land derives its name, Am hither come with swift career despatched By Phœbus, in your presence who himself Deems it not meet t'appear, lest his past conduct In foul reproach involve him: but the god Sends me t' inform you that Creusa bore, And Phœbus was the father who begot you. But you, the god, as he sees fit, bestows, Not upon him who is your real sire, But hath contrived this plot that you may gain The heritage of an illustrious house. For when the holy oracle pronounced This riddle, fearing, by a mother's wiles, Lest you should bleed, or with vindictive hand That mother slay, he by a stratagem Hath extricated both. The royal seer Meant to have kept this secret, till at Athens He had proclaimed that you derive your birth From Phœbus and Creusa. But this matter

That I may finish now, and the contents
Of those important oracles reveal,
Which to explore ye by your harnessed steeds
Where hither drawn, attend. Creusa, take
Thy son, to the Cecropian land repair,
And place him on the throne; for, from the race
Of great Erectheus sprung, he is entitled
To rule my favoured realm, and shall be famed
Through Greece: for his four sons, sprung from one
root,

Shall, on their country, and its tribes who dwell Upon my sacred rock, their name confer: Geleon the first; then Hoples, Argades, And, from the shield I bear, a chief called Ægis Shall rule th' Ægichori. But their descendants, Born at a period by the Fates assigned, Amid the Cyclades shall dwell, in towns Encircled by the billowy deep, and havens Which to my realm will add new strength: the shores Of either continent shall they possess, Asia and Europe, but, from Ion, styled Ionians, they with glory shall be crowned. But from thee too and Xuthus shall descend A noble race; Dorus, the mighty founder Of the famed Doric realm; in the domain Of ancient Pelops, shall your second son, Achæus, be the monarch of the coast Bordering on Rhium's steep ascent—with pride That nation shall adopt their leader's name. In all things hath Apollo acted right; First, without pain he caused thee to bring forth, Lest to thy friends thy shame should be revealed: But after thou hadst borne this son, and swathed Those fillets round him, he bade Hermes bring The infant to this fane, and nurtured him. Nor suffered him to die. Now, therefore, keep Strict silence, nor declare that he is thine. That Xuthus may exult in the idea Of being father to the youth, while thou, O woman, shalt enjoy the real bliss. Farewell, for from this pause in your afflictions I to you both announce a happier fate.

Ion. O Pallas, daughter of imperial Jove, Thy words I disbelieve not: for from Phœbus And this illustrious dame am I convinced That I derive my birth, which from the first Was not improbable.

Creusa. To what I speak
Now give attention: I commend Apollo,
Though erst I blamed him; for he now restores
To me the son he formerly neglected.
Now are these portals pleasing to my sight,
And this oracular abode of Phœbus,
Which I so lately loathed. I now these rings
Seize with exulting hands, and at the threshold
Utter my grateful orisons.

Minerva. The praises

Which thou bestow'st on Phœbus, I applaud,
And this thy sudden change: for though the aid
The gods afford be tardy, it at length
Proves most effectual.

Creusa. Let us, O my son,
Repair to our own Athens.

Minerva. Thither go,
And I will follow.

Creusa. Deign t' accompany
Our steps, and to our city prove a friend.
Minerva. Upon the throne of thy progenitors,

There take thy seat.

To me will such possession

Be honourable.

Chorus.

O Phœbus, son of Jove
And of Latona, hail! Whene'er his house
Is shaken by calamity, the man
Who pays due reverence to the gods hath cause
To trust in their protection: for at length
The virtuous shall obtain their due reward,
Nor shall the wicked prosper in the land

THE PHŒNICIAN DAMSELS

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

JOCASTA.
ATTENDANT.
ANTIGONE.
CHORUS OF PHŒNICIAN DAMSELS.
POLYNICES.
ETEOCLES.

CREON.
MENÆCEUS.
TIRESIAS.
MESSENGER.
ANOTHER MESSENGER.
ŒDIPUS.

Scene. - AN OPEN COURT BEFORE THE PALACE AT THEBES.

JOCASTA.

O THOU, who through the starry heavens divid'st
Thy path, and on a golden chariot sitt'st
Exalted, radiant sun, beneath the hoofs
Of whose swift steeds the fiery volumes roll,
How inauspicious, o'er the Theban race
Didst thou dart forth thy beams, the day when
Cadmus

Came to this land from the Phœnician coast. He erst obtained Harmonia for his bride, Daughter of Venus; of their loves the fruit Was Polydorus, and from him, as fame Relates, descended Labdacus, the sire Of Laius. From Menæceus I derive My birth; my brother Creon and myself From the same mother spring; but I am called Tocasta, 'twas the name my father gave; Me royal Laius married; but when long Our bed had proved unfruitful, he to search The oracle of Phœbus went, and sued To the prophetic god, that he our house Would cheer with an auspicious race of sons: The god replied, "Beware, O thou who rul'st The martial Thebans, strive not to obtain A progeny against the will of Heaven: If thou beget a son, that son shall slay thee, And all thy household shall be plunged in blood." He overcome by lust, and flushed with wine. In an unguarded moment disobeyed: But I no sooner had brought forth the child

Than he, grown conscious of his foul offence Against Apollo's mandate, to his shepherds, The new-born infant gave, in Juno's meads. And on Cithæron's hill, to be exposed, Maiming his feet with pointed steel, whence Greece Hath called him Œdipus. But they who fed The steeds of Polypus, soon taking up, Conveyed him to their home, and in the hands Of their kind mistress placed, she at her breast Nurtured my son, and artfully persuaded Her lord that she was mother to the boy: Soon as the manly beard his cheek o'erspread. Aware from his own knowledge, or informed Of the deceit, solicitous to learn Who were his parents, to Apollo's shrine He journeyed; and at the same time was Laius, My husband, hastening hither, to inquire Whether the child he had exposed was dead. In Phocis, where two severed roads unite, They met: the charioteer of Laius cried In an imperious tone, "Give way to kings, Thou stranger": yet the silent youth advanced, With inborn greatness fired, till o'er his feet Distained with gore the steel-hoofed coursers trod; Hence (for what need have I to speak of aught That's foreign to my woes?) th' unconscious son Slew his own father, seized the spoils, and gave To Polybus, who nurtured him, the car. But when with ruthless fangs the Sphynx laid waste The city, and my husband was no more, My brother Creon by the herald's voice Proclaimed that whosoever could expound Th' enigma by that crafty virgin forged Should win me for his bride: that mystic clue The luckless Œdipus, my son, unravelled; Hence o'er this land appointed king, he gained For his reward a sceptre—wretched youth!— Unwittingly espousing me who bore him; Nor yet was I his mother then aware That we committed incest. I produced To my own son four children; two were males, Eteocles and Polynices, famed

For martial prowess; daughters two, the one Her father called Ismene, but the first I named Antigone. Soon as he learned That I whom he had wedded was his mother, The miserable Œdipus, o'erwhelmed With woes accumulated, from their sockets Tore with a golden clasp his bleeding eyes. But since the beard o'ershaded my sons' cheeks, Their sire they in a dungeon have confined, The memory of this sad event t' efface, For which they needed every subtle art. Within these mansions he still lives, but, sick With evil fortunes, on his sons pours forth The most unholy curses, that this house They by the sword may portion out. Alarmed Lest Heaven those vows accomplish if they dwell Together, they by compact have resolved The younger brother Polynices first A voluntary exile shall depart, And, with Eteocles remaining here To wield the sceptre of this realm, exchange His station year by year: but th' elder-born Since he was seated on the lofty throne Departs not thence, and from this land expels The injured Polynices, who, to Argos Repairing, with Adrastus hath contracted Most strict affinity, and hither brings A numerous squadron of heroic youths; These bulwarks for their sevenfold gates renowned E'en now in arms approaching, he demands His father's sceptre, and an equal share Of the domain. But I to end their strife On Polynices have prevailed to come, Under the sanction of a warrior's faith And parley with his brother, ere the hosts In battle join: the messenger I sent Informs me he the summons will attend. O thou who dwell'st amidst Heaven's lucid folds, Save us, dread Jove, and reconcile my children: For thou, if thou art wise, wilt ne'er permit That one poor mortal should be always wretched. Exit TOCASTA. ANTIGONE, ATTENDANT.

Attend. O fair Antigone, illustrious blossom Of your paternal house, since from your chamber Your mother hath allowed you to come forth At your request, and from these roofs behold The Argive hosts, stay here, while I the road Explore, lest in our passage, if we meet Some citizen, malignant tongues should blame Both me, the servant, who obey, and you For giving such command. But their whole camp Since I have searched, to you will I relate All that these eyes have witnessed, and whate'er I heard amidst the Argives, when, employed By both your brothers, I 'twixt either host Bore pledges of their compact. But these mansions No citizen approaches: haste, ascend Yon ancient stairs of cedar, and o'erlook The spacious fields that skirt Ismenos' stream And Dirce's fountains. What a host of foes!

Antigone. Thy aged arm stretch forth, and, as I climb The narrow height, my tottering steps sustain.

Attend. Give me your hand, for at a lucky hour You mount the turret: the Pelasgian host Is now in motion, and the troops divide.

Antigone. Thou venerable daughter of Latona,

Thrice sacred goddess, Hecate, how gleams
With brazen armour the whole field around!

Attend. For Polynices to his native land
Returns not like a man of little note,
But comes in anger, by unnumbered steeds
Attended, and the loudest din of arms.

Antigone. Are the gates closed? What barriers guard the walls Reared by Amphion's skill?

Attend. Be of good cheer.

The city is made safe within. But look
At him who first advances, if you wish

To know him.

Antigone. By those snowy plumes distinguished,
Before the ranks who marches in the van,
With ease sustaining on his nervous arm
That brazen shield?

Attend. A general, royal maid.

Antigone. Who is he? In what country was he born, Old man, inform me, and what name he bears.

Attend. Mycene glories in the warrior's birth,

But near the marsh of Lerna he resides; His name's Hippomedon, a mighty chief.

Antigone. Ah, with what pride, how terrible an aspect,
How like an earthborn giant doth he move!
His targe with stars is covered, and that air
Resembles not the feeble race of man.

Attend. Behold you not the chief who Dirce's stream Is crossing!

Antigone. In what different armour clad!

But who is he?

Attend. Tydeus, the noble son Of Œneus; in embattled fields his breast With true Ætolian courage is inspired.

Antigone. Is he, O veteran, husband to the sister Of Polynices' consort? How arrayed In party-coloured mail, a half Barbarian!

Attend. All the Ætolians, O my daughter, armed With bucklers, can expertly hurl the lance.

Antigone. But whence, old man, art thou assured of this?

Attend. The various figures wrought upon the shields
I noticed at the time I from the walls
Went to your brother with the pledge of truce:
When these I see, their wearers well I know.

Antigone. But who is he who moves round Zethus tomb,
A youth with streaming ringlets, and with eyes
Horribly glaring?

Attend. He too is a chief.

Antigone. What multitudes in burnished armour clad Follow his steps!

Attend. From Atalanta sprung.
Parthenopæus is the name he bears.

Antigone. May Dian, who o'er craggy mountain speeds,
Attended by his mother, with her shafts
Transpierce th' audacious youth who comes to sack
My city!

Attend. These rash vows suppress, O daughter, For they with justice these domains invade,

And therefore will the gods, I fear, discern Their better cause.

Antigone. But where is he, whom Fate

Decreed in evil hour from the same womb

With me to spring? Say, O thou dear old man,

Where's Polynices?

Attend. He beside the tomb

Of Niobe's seven virgin daughters stands

Close to Adrastus. See you him?

Antigone.

But not distinctly; I can just discern
A faint resemblance of that kindred form,
The image of that bosom. Would to Heaven,
Borne on the skirts of yonder passing cloud,
Through the ethereal paths, I with these feet
Could to my brother urge my swift career!
Then would I fling my arms round the dear neck
Of him who long hath been a wretched exile.
How gracefully, in golden arms arrayed,
Bright as Hyperion's radiant beams, he moves!

Attend. To fill your soul with joy, the chief, these doors, Secured by an inviolable truce, Anon will enter.

Antigone. O thou aged man;
But who is he who on you chariot, drawn
By milk-white coursers, seated, guides the reins?

Attend. The seer Amphiareus, O royal maid,
He bears the victims that with crimson tides
Must drench the ground.

Antigone. Encircled with a zone
Of radiance, O thou daughter of the sun,
Pale moon, who from his beams thy golden orb
Illum'st, behold with what a steady thong
And how discreetly he those coursers guides!
But where is Capaneus, who proudly utters
Against this city the most horrid threats?

Attend. To these seven turrets each approach he marks,
The walls from their proud summit to their base
Measuring with eager eye.

Antigone. Dread Nemesis,
Ye, too, O deep-toned thunderbolts of Jove,
And livid flames of lightning; yours, 'tis yours

To blast such arrogance. Is this the man Who vowed that he the captive Theban dames, In slavery plunged, would to Mycene lead, To Lerna, where the god of ocean fixed His trident, whence its waters bear the name Of Amyone? But, O child of Jove, Diana, venerable queen, who bind'st Thy streaming tresses with a golden caul, Never may I endure the loathsome yoke Of servitude.

Attend.

O daughter, and beneath its roof remain
In your apartment, since you have indulged
Your wish, and viewed those objects you desired.
A tumult in the city now prevails:
The women to the palace rush in crowds,
For the whole female sex are prone to slander,
And soon as they some slight occasion find,
On which malignant rumours they can ground,
Add many more: for on such baneful themes
To them is it delightful to converse.

[Execunt.]

CHORUS.

ODE.

I. I.

Borne from Phœnician shores I crossed the deep,
My tender years to Phœbus they consign
To sprinkle incense on his shrine,
And dwell beneath Parnassus' steep,
O'erspread with everlasting snow:
Our dashing oars were plied in haste
Through the Ionian wave, whose eddies flow
Round Sicily's inhospitable waste;
Then vernal zephyrs breathed our sails around,
And Heaven's high-vaulted roof conveyed the murmuring sound.

I. 2.

A chosen offering to the Delphic god, I from my native city to this land, Where aged Cadmus bore command, Am come, obedient to the nod
Of those who from Agenor spring,
To the proud towers of Laius' race,
Our kindred governed by a kindred king.
Here stand I, like an image on its base,
Though destined to partake refined delights,
Bathe in Castalia's stream, and tend Apollo's rites.

I. 3.

O mountain, from whose cloven height There darts a double stream of light, Oft on thy topmost ridge the Menades are seen, And thou, each day distilling generous wine, O plant of Bacchus, whose ripe clusters shine,

Blushing through the leaf's faint green; Ye caves, in which the Python lay,

And hills, from whence Apollo twanged his bow,
Around your heights o'erspread with snow,
'Midst my loved virgin comrades may I stray,
Each anxious fear expelling from my breast,
In the world's centre, that auspicious fane

The residence of Phœbus blest, And bid adieu to Dirce's plain.

II. I.

But now before these walls doth Mars advance,
And brandish slaughter's flaming torch around;
May Thebes ne'er feel the threatened wound,
For to a friend his friend's mischance
Is grievous as his own: each ill
That lights upon these sevenfold towers
With equal woe Phœnicia's realm must fill:
For Thebes I mourn; since, of one blood with ours
From Io's loves this nation dates its birth,
Those sorrows I partake which vex my kindred earth.

II. 2.

Thick as a wintry cloud that phalanx stands,
Whose gleaming shields portend the bloody fight,
The god of war with stern delight
Shall to the siege those hostile bands
Lead on, and rouse the fiends to smite
The race of an incestuous bed:

Much, O Pelasgian Argos, much thy might, And more the vengeance of the gods I dread; For, armed with justice, on his native land Rushes that banished youth, the sceptre to demand.

POLYNICES, CHORUS.

Polynices. They who were stationed to observe the gates
Unbarred them, and with courtesy received me
As I the fortress entered: hence I fear
Lest, now they in their wily toils have caught,
They should detain and slay me; I with eyes
Most vigilant must therefore look around
To guard 'gainst treachery: but the sword which

This hand shall give me courage. Ho! who's there? Doth a mere sound alarm me? All things seem, E'en to the bravest, dreadful, when they march O'er hostile ground. I in my mother placed Firm confidence, yet hardly can I trust Her who on me prevailed t' accept the pledge And hither come. But I have near at hand A sure asylum, for the blazing altars Are not remote, nor yet is yonder house Without inhabitants. Be sheathed my sword. Those courteous nymphs who at the portals stand I'll question. O ye foreign damsels, say, What was the country whence to Greece ye came?

What was the country whence to Greece ye came?

Chorus. Phœnicia is my native land, I there

Was nurtured: but Agenor's martial race

Me, the first fruit of their victorious arms,

A votive offering to Apollo sent,

But to the venerable prophetic domes,

And blazing shrines of Phœbus, when the son

Of Œdipus prepared to have conveyed me,

The Argives 'gainst this city led their host.

Now in return inform me who thou art

Who com'st to Thebes, o'er whose seven gates are

Who com'st to Thebes, o'er whose seven gates are reared

As many turrets.

Polynices. Œdipus, the son
Of Laius, was my sire: Menæceus' daughter

Jocasta brought me forth; the name I bear Is Polynices.

Chorus. O, illustrious king,

Thou kinsman to Agenor's race, my lords
By whom I was sent hither, at thy feet,
I as the usage of my country bids
Prostrate myself. Thou to thy native land
After a tedious absence art returned.
But ho! come forth, thou venerable dame,
Open the doors! O mother of the chief,
Hear'st thou my voice? Why yet dost thou delay
To cross the lofty palace, and with speed
In those fond arms thy dearest son enfold?

JOCASTA, POLYNICES, CHORUS.

Jocasta. Within the palace, O Phœnician nymphs, Hearing your voice, I with a tardy step, Trembling through age, creep hither. O my son, At length I, after many days, once more Behold that face. Fling, fling those arms around The bosom of your mother; those loved cheeks Let me embrace, and with your azure tresses, My neck o'ershadowing, mix my streaming hair. To these maternal arms you scarce return, Till hope and expectation both had failed. O how shall I accost you, how impart To my whole frame the transports of my soul, And all around me, wheresoe'er I turn, Bid pleasures past and distant years revive? My son, you left this mansion of your sire A desert, by your haughty brother wronged And exiled from your country. By each friend How greatly hath your absence been bewailed! How greatly by all Thebes! My hoary locks Hence did I sever from this aged head, Hence weeping utter many piteous notes, And, O my son, the tissued robes of white Which erst I wore, exchange for sable weeds, These loathed habiliments. Within the palace Your father, of his eyesight reft, bewails The disunited pillars of his house: Resolved to slay himself, he sometimes strives

To rush on the drawn sword; then searches round For the high beam to fix the gliding noose, Groaning forth imprecations 'gainst his son; Thus, uttering with shrill tone his clamorous plaints, He lives, encompassed by perpetual night. But, ah! my son, by wedlock's strictest bonds United, I am told that you enjoy A foreign consort, in a foreign realm, To vex your mother's soul and the stern ghost Of Laius; on such ill-assorted nuptials Curses attend. The Hymeneal torch I kindled not to grace your spousal rites, As custom hath ordained, and it behoves A happy mother; nor his cooling stream To fill the laver did Ismenos yield; Nor on th' arrival of thy royal bride Through Thebes were festive acclamations heard. Perish the cause of this unnatural war, Be it or sword, or discord, of your sire, Or fate, whose horrors revel in the house Of Œdipus: for these disasters sting My soul with anguish.

Chorus.

Great endearments rise

From pangs maternal, and all women love

Their progeny.

Polynices. Amidst my foes I come, O mother, whether wisely or unwisely,

O mother, whether wisely or unwisely,
Great are my doubts: but all men are constrained
To love their country. He who argues aught
Against a truth so clear in empty words
Takes pleasure, while his heart confutes his tongue.
Yet with such panic terror was I seized,
Lest by some stratagem my brother slay me,
That, bearing a drawn falchion in my hand,
I cast my eyes around on every side
As I the city traversed: my sole trust
Is in the truce he swore to, and thy faith,
Which led me to this mansion of my sire:
Yet as I came full many a tear I shed,
After long absence, to behold the palace,
The sacred altars of the gods, that ring

Where wrestlers strive, scene of my youthful sports.

And Dirce's fountain. Hence unjustly driven I in a foreign city dwell, and steep These eyes in tears incessant. But to add Grief to my griefs, thee with thy tresses shorn I see, and in a sable vest arrayed. Wretch that I am! How dreadful and how hard To reconcile, is enmity 'twixt those Of the same house, O mother! But how fares My aged sire within, whose eyes are closed In total darkness? how, my sisters twain? Bewail they not their exiled brother's fate? Tocasta. Some god hath smitten the devoted house Of Œdipus. I first 'gainst Heaven's decrees Brought forth a son, and in an evil hour Wedded that son, to whom you owe your birth. But wherefore should I dwell upon these scenes Of horror? It behoves us to bear up Under the woes inflicted by the gods.

Is my desire most urgent.

Polynices. Question me,

Leave nought unsaid! for, O my dearest mother, Whatever is thy pleasure will to me

How shall I ask the questions which I wish?— Fearing to wound your soul—yet to propose them

Seem grateful.

Jocasta. With what most I wish to know Will I begin my questions. Is not exile

A grievous ill?

Polynices. Most grievous, and indeed

Worse than in name.

The misery of the banished man?

Whence rises

Polynices. He's subject
To one severe calamity—he wants

To one severe calamity—he wants Freedom of speech.

The wretch of whom you talk,

Who utters not his thoughts, is but a slave. *Polynices*. The follies of their rulers they must bear.

Incasta. This were a piteous doom, to be constrained
To imitate th' unwise.

Polynices. If gain ensue,
We must submit, though nature's voice forbid.

Jocasta. Hopes, it is said, the hungry exile feed.

Polynices. With smiles they view him, but are slow to aid.

Jocasta. Doth not time prove their falsehood?

Polynices.

They possess

An influence equal to the Queen of Love; They banish every sorrow from the breast.

Jocasta. But whence procured you food, ere you obtained A sustenance by wedlock?

Polynices. For the day
At times I had sufficient, but at times
Was wholly destitute.

Jocasta. Your father's friends,
And they who shared his hospitable board,
Did they not aid you?

Polynices. Be thou ever blest! For he who is unhappy hath no friend.

Jocasta. But did not your illustrious birth advance you

To some exalted station?

Polynices. A great curse
Is poverty: this high descent with food
Supplied me not.

Jocasta. To all mankind it seems
Their native land's most dear.

Polynices. Words have not power

T' express what love I for my country feel.

Jocasta. But why to Argos went you, what design

Had you then formed?

Polynices. Apollo to Adrastus
Pronounced a certain oracle.

Jocasta. What mean you?

I cannot comprehend.

Polynices. That he in wedlock Should join his daughters to the boar and lion.

Jocasta. How did the names of these ferocious beasts Relate to you, my son?

Polynices. I cannot tell.

To this adventure was I called by fortune.

Jocasta. That goddess is discreet: but by what means
Did you obtain your consort?

Polynices. It was nigh
When to Adrastus' vestibule I came.

Jocasta. To seek your lodging, like a banished vagrant?

Polynices. E'en so: and there I met another exile.

Jocasta. Who was he? Him most wretched too I deem.

Polynices. Tydeus, the son of Œneus, I am told.

Jocasta. But wherefore did Adrastus to wild beasts

Compare you?

Polynices. From our fighting for a den. Jocasta. Did then the son of Talaus thus expound
The oracles?

Polynices. And on us two bestowed His daughters.

nis daugnters.

Jocasta. But have these espousals proved Happy, or inauspicious?

Polynices. I have found

No reason yet to curse the day I wedded. Jocasta. Yet how prevailed you on a foreign host Hither to follow you?

Polynices. Adrastus sware To Tydeus and myself, his sons-in-law (Who now by strict affinity are joined), That both of us he in our native realms Will reinstate, but Polynices first. Unnumbered Argives and Mycene's chiefs Crowd to my banners, a lamented succour, But such as stern necessity demands, Affording: for my country I invade. Yet witness for me, O ye righteous gods, 'Tis with reluctance that I wield the spear Against my dearest parents. But to thee, O mother, it belongs to end this strife, To reconcile two brothers, and to cause My toils, and thine, and those of Thebes, to cease. Indulge me while I quote an ancient maxim: "Of human honours riches are the source, And rule with power supreme the tribes of men." In quest of wealth I hither come, and lead Unnumbered squadrons to the dubious field, For indigent nobility is scorned.

Chorus. But lo! Eteocles himself repairs

To th' appointed conference. In such terms
As may restore peace 'twist thy sons, be thine,
Jocasta, the maternal task t' address them.

ETEOCLES, POLYNICES, JOCASTA, CHORUS.

Eteocles. With your request, O mother, to comply,
Hither I come: but what must now be done?
Let others speak before me. For the squadrons
I round the walls have marshalled, and restrained
The ardour of the city, till I hear
What terms of peace you would propose, what views
Within these walls induced you to receive
My brother, by the public faith secured,
Extorting my consent.

Jocasta. Yet pause awhile;

For haste is incompatible with justice;
But slow deliberations oft effect
Such schemes as wisdom dictates. Lay aside
Those threatening looks, that vehemence of soul;
For thou behold'st not the terrific head
Lopped from Medusa's shoulders, but behold'st
Thy brother coming. Your benignant eyes,
O Polynices, on your brother turn,
For while you look upon that kindred face
You will speak better, and his words receive
With more advantage. Fain would I suggest

One act of wholesome prudence to you both; An angered friend, when with his friend he meets, Should at such interview attend to nought But those pacific schemes on which he came, Their ancient broils forgetting. 'Tis incumbent

On you, O Polynices, to speak first,

Because, complaining of great wrongs, you lead An Argive army hither. May some god

Judge 'twixt my sons, and reconcile their strife!

Polynices. Plain are the words of truth, and justice needs

No subtlety t' interpret, for it bears

Enough to recommend it: but injustice, Devoid of all internal worth, requires

Each specious art. My father's house, my interests,

His also, I consulted: and the curse

Which Œdipus had erst pronounced against us, Anxious to shun, from these domains retired

A voluntary exile, and to him

Surrendered up the sceptre for one year,

That in my turn I might be king, nor come, With enmity and slaughter in my train, Those mischiefs which from discord must ensue To act or suffer. He, who to these terms Assented, and for sanctions of his oath Invoked the gods, hath not accomplished aught Of his engagements, but still keeps the throne, And o'er my portion of our father's realm Without a colleague reigns. I, on receiving My rights, e'en now am ready from this land To send the troops, and in my palace rule For an appointed time, then yield again The empire to my brother, nor lay waste My country, nor the scaling-ladder plant Against yon turrets: yet will I attempt To do all this, if justice be denied me. I call the gods to witness these assertions: That though each solemn contract on my part Hath been performed, I from my native land By lawless force am driven. I have collected No specious words, O mother, to adorn Truths which with equal force must strike the wise And the illiterate, if I judge aright.

Chorus. To me, although I in a Grecian realm
Have not been nurtured, thou appear'st to speak

With much discretion.

Eteocles. If, in their ideas Of excellence and wisdom, all concurred, No strife had e'er perplexed the human race. But now, among the tribes of men, are fit, And right, and fair equality mere names, In real life no longer to be found. To you, O mother, I without concealment Will speak my sentiments: I would ascend The starry paths whence bursts the orient sun, And plunge beneath the central earth, to win Empire, the greatest of th' immortal powers. I therefore will not yield up such a good To any other, but for my own use Retain it, O my mother: for of manhood Devoid is he who tamely bears the loss

Of what he prizes most, and in its stead

Accepts some mean exchange. Yet more, it shames me

That he, who proudly comes with arms to lay Our country waste, his wishes should obtain. For this would be to Thebes a foul reproach, If, trembling at Mycene's spear, I gave To him my sceptre. Thus arrayed in mail He ought not to negotiate terms of peace. For all that by the sword our haughty foes Hope to exact might gentle words procure. If such his pleasure, he on other terms Shall be permitted in this land to dwell; But never can I willingly forego That one great object, nor, while sovereign power Is yet within my reach, will I e'er stoop To be his vassal: rather come, ye flames, Ye falchions; let the warrior steed be harnessed, With brazen chariots cover all the field, I never will surrender up my throne. Since, if we must o'erleap the narrow bounds Of justice, for an empire, to transgress Were glorious; we in every point beside Are bound to act as virtue's rules enjoin.

Chorus. No ornaments of speech to evil deeds

Are due, for justice hates such borrowed charms.

Jocasta. Believe me, O Eteocles my son,

Old age is not by wretchedness alone Attended: more discreetly than rash youth Experience speaks. Why dost thou woo ambition, That most malignant goddess? O forbear! For she's a foe to justice, and hath entered Full many a mansion, many a prosperous city, Nor left them till in ruin she involves All those who harbour her: yet this is she 'Twere better, O my son, On whom thou doat'st. To cultivate equality, who joins Friends, cities, heroes, in one steadfast league For by the laws of nature, through the world Equality was 'stablished: but the wealthy Finds in the poorer man a constant foe; Hence bitter enmity derives its source. Equality, among the human race,

Measures, and weights, and numbers hath ordained: Both the dark orb of night and radiant sun Their annual circuits equally perform; Each, free from envy, to the other yields Alternately; thus day and night afford Their services to man. Yet wilt not thou Be satisfied to keep an equal portion Of these domains, and to thy brother give His due. Where then is justice? Such respect As sober reason disapproves, why pay'st thou To empire, to oppression crowned with triumph? To be a public spectacle thou deem'st Were honourable. 'Tis but empty pride. When thou hast much already, why submit To toils unnumbered? What's superfluous wealth But a mere name? Sufficient to the wise Is competence: for man possesses nought Which he can call his own. Though for a time What bounty the indulgent gods bestow We manage, they resume it at their will: Unstable riches vanish in a day. Should I to thee th' alternative propose Either to reign, or save thy native land, Couldst thou reply that thou hadst rather reign? But if he conquer, and the Argive spears O'erpower the squadrons who from Cadmus spring, Thou wilt behold Thebes taken, wilt behold Our captive virgins ravished by the foe: That empire which thou seek'st will prove the bane

Of thy loved country; yet thou still persist'st In mischievous ambition's wild career. Thus far to thee. And now to you I speak, O Polynices; favours most unwise Are those Adrastus hath on you bestowed, And with misjudging fury are you come To spread dire havoc o'er your native land. If you (which may the righteous gods avert!) This city take, how will you rear the trophies Of such a battle? How, when you have laid Your country waste, th' initiatory rites Perform, and slay the victims? On the banks

Of Inachus displayed, with what inscription
Adorn the spoils—"From blazing Thebes these
shields

Hath Polynices won, and to the gods Devoted"? Never, O my son, through Greece May you obtain such glory. But if you Are vanquished and Eteocles prevail, To Argos, leaving the ensanguined field Strewn with unnumbered corses of the slain, How can you flee for succour? 'Twill be said By some malignant tongue: "A curst alliance Is this which, O Adrastus, thou hast formed: We to the nuptials of one virgin owe Our ruin." You are hastening, O my son, Into a twofold mischief: losing all That you attempt, and causing your brave friends To perish. O my sons, this wild excess Of rage, with joint concurrence, lay aside. By equal folly when two chiefs inspired To battle rush, dire mischief must ensue.

Chorus. Avert these woes, and reconcile the sons
Of Œdipus, ye gods.

Eteocles.

Is ours, O mother; we but waste the time,
And all your care avails not. For no peace
Can we conclude on any other terms
Than those already named—that I, still wielding
The sceptre, shall be monarch of this land:
Then leave me to myself, and cease to urge
These tedious admonitions. As for thee,
O Polynices, from these walls depart,
Or thou shalt die.

Polynices. By whom? Who can be found Invulnerable enough, with reeking sword

To strike me dead, yet 'scape the self-same fate?

Eteocles. Beside thee, and not distant far he stands.

Seest thou this arm?

Polynices. I see it: but wealth makes
Its owners timid, and too fond of life.

Eteocles. Art thou come hither with a numerous host 'Gainst him thou count'st a dastard in the field?

Polynices. A cautious general's better than a bold.

Eteocles. Thou on that compact, which preserves thy life, Too haughtily presum'st.

Polynices. Again I claim

The sceptre and my portion of this realm.

Eteocles. Ill-founded is thy claim, for I will dwell
In my own house.

Polynices. Retaining to yourself
More than your share?

Eteocles. The words which I pronounce

Are these: Depart thou from the Theban land.

Polynices. Ye altars of my loved paternal gods— Eteocles. Which thou art come to plunder—

Polynices. Hear my voice.

Eteocles. What deity will hear thee, 'gainst thy country While thus thou wagest war?

Polynices. And ye abodes
Of these two gods on milk-white coursers borne.

Eteocles. Who hate thee.

Polynices. From the mansions of my sire Am I expelled.

Eteocles. Because thou hither cam'st
Those mansions to destroy.

Polynices. Thence was I driven With foul injustice. O ye powers divine!

Eteocles. Go to Mycene; there, and not at Thebes, Invoke the gods.

Polynices. You trample on the laws. Eteocles. Yet am not I, like thee, my country's foe. Polynices. Reft of my portion, while you drive me forth

An exile.

Eteocles. Thee moreover will I slay.

Polynices. Hear'st thou what wrongs, my father, I endure? Eteocles. Thy actions too have reached his ears.

Polynices. And you,

My mother.

Eteocles. Thou thy mother canst not name Without a profanation.

Polynices. O thou city!

Eteocles. To Argos haste, and there invoke the pool
Of Lerna.

Polynices. I depart: forbear to grieve For me, O mother, but accept my praise.

Eteocles. From these domains avaunt!

Permit me to behold our sire.

Eteocles.

Before I go,

Thou shalt not

Obtain this boon.

Polynices. My virgin sisters then.

Eteocles. Them, too, thou ne'er shalt see.

Polynices. Alas! dear sisters!

Eteocles. Why nam'st thou those to whom thou art most hateful?

Polynices. Joy to my mother!

Jocasta. Have I any cause

For joy, my son?

Polynices. No longer am I yours, Jocasta. Full many and most grievous are my woes.

Polynices. Because he wrongs me.

Eteocles. Equal are the wrongs

I suffer.

Polynices. Where will you your station take Before you turrets?

Eteocles.

For what purpose ask

This question?

Polynices. I in battle am resolved
To meet and slay you.

Eteocles. The same wish now fires

My inmost soul.

Jocasta. Alas! my sons, what mean ye? Eteocles. The fact itself must show.

Jocasta.

The curses of your sire?

Eteocles. Perdition seize

On our whole house! Soon shall my sword, embrued With gore, no longer in its scabbard rest.

[Exit JOCASTA.

Will ye not shun

Polynices. Thou soil which nurtured me, and every god,
Bear witness, that with insults and with wrongs
O'erwhelmed I from my country, like a slave,
Not like the son of Œdipus, am driven.
Whate'er thou suffer, O thou city, blame,
Not me, but him: for I was loth t' invade
This land, and with reluctance now depart.
Thou too, O Phœbus, mighty king, who guard'st

These streets, ye palaces, my youthful comrades, Farewell! and, O ye statues of the gods, Drenched with the blood of victims!—for I know not Whether I ever shall accost you more. But hope yet sleeps not, and in her I place My trust, that with Heaven's aid I shall enjoy The Theban realm, when I have slain this boaster.

[Exit POLYNICES.

Eteocles. Leave these domains: a forethought by the gods
Inspired, my father prompted, when on thee
The name of Polynices, to denote
Abundance of contention, he bestowed.

Exit ETEOCLES.

CHORUS.

ODE.

ī.

Erst to this land the Tyrian Cadmus came,
When at his feet a heifer lay,
Who in the meads unyoked was wont to stray,
Fulfilling Heaven's response, well known to fame,

And marked the spot where he should dwell:
The oracle announced this fruitful ground
For his abode, where, from her limpid well,
Fair Dirce spreads a cooling stream around,
And on her banks are vernal blossoms found:

Compressed by amorous Jove Here Semele the ruddy Bromius bore, Whom ivy with luxuriant tendrils strove

In infancy to mantle o'er And round his happy brows to spread. Hence, in bacchanalian dance,

With light and wanton tread The Theban nymphs advance, And matrons all their cares resign, Gay votaries to the god of wine.

II.

Mars at the fount its ruthless guardian placed, On scaly folds a dragon rode, Wild glared his eyes, in vain the waters flowed, Nor dared the thirsting passenger to taste:
Advancing with undaunted tread
To draw libations for the powers divine,
A ponderous stone full on the monster's head
Cadmus discharged, then seized and pierced his
chine

chine
With frequent wounds; so Pallas did enjoin:
This done, the teeth he sowed,
And instantly, dire spectacle, a train,
All clad in mail, on earth's torn surface glowed;
Soon was each hardy warrior slain,
And to the soil which gave him birth
Joined once more: a crimson flood
Moistened the lap of earth:
By parching winds their blood

III.

Was visited, and still remain
Its marks on the discoloured plain.

To thee, O Epaphus, the child of Jove,
Sprung from our grandame Io's love,
I cried in a barbaric strain:
O visit, visit this once favoured plain
Which thy descendants call their own.

Two goddesses by countless votaries known, Proserpina, dread queen, who from our birth Conducts us to the tomb, with Ceres the benign,

E'en she whose foodful shrine
Is thronged by every denizen of earth,
From earliest days this realm possessed;
With lambent glories on their front displayed,
O send them to its aid;

Nought can withstand a god's request.

ETEOCLES, CHORUS.

Eteocles [to one of his ATTENDANTS.] Go thou, and hither bring Menæceus' son,
Creon, the noble brother of Jocasta,
My mother; tell him, on my own affairs,
And on the public interests of the state,

With him I would consult, ere host opposed To host in battle meet and launch the spear.

But lo! he is at hand to spare thy feet The toil of this their errand: I behold him Approach the palace.

CREON, ETEOCLES, CHORUS.

Creon. I to every gate
And every sentinel, my royal lord,
Have gone in quest of you.

Eteocles. Thee, too, I longed,
O Creon, to behold: for I have found
Treaties for peace all fruitless since I spoke
With Polynices.

Creon. He, I hear, looks down
With scorn on Thebes, trusting in his ally
Adrastus, and that numerous Argive host.
But we to the decision of the gods
Must now refer. Most urgent are th' affairs
Of which I come to tell.

Eteocles. What means my friend?
Thy words I comprehend not.

Creon. From the camp
Of Argos a deserter came.

Eteocles. To bring

Some recent tidings of what passes there?

Creon. Their host, he says, arrayed in glittering mail, Will instantly besiege the Theban towers.

Eteocles. The valiant race of Cadmus from these gates
Must sally forth, to guard their native land.

Creon. What mean you? Sees not your impetuous youth Our strength in a false light?

Eteocles. Without the trenches,

To show that we are ready for the combat.

Creon. Few are the Theban squadrons, but the number Of theirs is great.

Eteocles. In words I know them brave. Creon. The fame of Argos through all Greece resounds. Eteocles. Be of good cheer; I with their corses soon

These fields will cover.

Creon. With your wishes mine Concur: but I foresee that such emprise Abounds with heaviest dangers.

Eteocles. Be assured
I will not coop my host within the walls.

Creon. On prudent counsels our success depends.

Eteocles. Wouldst thou persuade me therefore to attempt Some other method?

Creon. Ere you risk our fate
On one decisive battle, have recourse
To all expedients.

Eteocles. What if I rush forth
From ambush, and encounter them by night?

Creon. Could you return, if worsted, and take shelter Within these walls?

Eteocles. Night to both hosts affords
The same impediments; but they fare best
Who give th' assault.

Creon. 'Tis terrible to rush
On danger 'midst the thickest clouds of darkness.

Eteocles. Shall I then launch the javelin, while they sit
Around the genial board?

Creon. This might alarm them:
Our business is to conquer.

Eteocles. Dirce's channel, Which they must cross in their retreat, is deep.

Creon. All schemes you can propose are less expedient
Than if you with a prudent caution act.

Eteocles. But what if we with cavalry attack
The Argive camp?

Creon. On every side the host
With chariots is secured.

Eteocles. What then remains

For me to do? Must I surrender up

This city to our foes?

Creon. Not thus; exert Your wisdom, and deliberate.

Eteocles. What precaution,
Think'st thou, were most discreet?

Creon. I am informed They have seven champions.

Eteocles. What's the task assigned

For them t' effect? Their strength can be but

small.

Creon. To head as many bands, and storm each gate.

Eteocles. How then shall we proceed? For I disdain To sit inactive.

Creon. On your part select
Seven warriors who the portals may defend.

Eteocles. O'er squadrons to preside, or take their stand

As single combatants?

Creon. To lead seven squadrons, Choosing the bravest.

Eteocles. Well I understand
Thy purpose; to prevent the foe from scaling
The ramparts.

Creon. Comrades of experience add;

For one man sees not all.

Eteocles. Shall I to valour Or wisdom give the preference?

Green.

Join them both:
For one without the other is a thing
Of no account.

Eteocles. It shall be done. I'll march Into the city, place at every gate A chief, as thou hast counselled, and the troops Distribute so that we on equal terms May with the foe engage. It would be tedious The name of every warrior to recount, Just at this moment, when beneath our walls The enemy is posted. But with speed I go, that I in action may not prove A loiterer. May it be my lot to meet My brother hand to hand, that with this spear I 'midst the lines of battle may transfix And kill that spoiler, who is come to lay My country waste. I to thy care entrust The nuptials of Antigone, my sister, And thy son Hæmon, if it be my fate To perish in the combat, and enforce Our former contract with my dying breath. Thou art Jocasta's brother: of what use Are many words? My mother in such rank Maintain as suits thy honour and the love Thou bear'st me. As for my unhappy sire, To his own folly are his sufferings due, Bereft of evesight; him I cannot praise,

For by his curses would he slay us both. One thing have we omitted-of the seer Tiresias to inquire if he have aught Of Heaven's obscure responses to disclose. Thy son, Menæceus from his grandsire named, To fetch the prophet hither will I send, O Creon, for he gladly will converse With thee: but I so scornfully have treated, E'en in his presence, the whole soothsayer's art, That he abhors me. But I, on the city And thee, O Creon, this injunction lay If I prove stronger, suffer not the corse Of Polynices in this Theban realm To be interred: let death be the reward Of him who scatters dust o'er his remains, Although he be the dearest of my friends. Thus far to thee—but to my followers this I add: bring forth my shield, my helm, my greaves, And radiant mail, that by victorious justice Accompanied, I instantly may rush Amidst the fray which waits me. But to prudence, Who best of all th' immortal powers protects The interests of her votaries, let us pray That she this city would from ruin save.

Exit ETEOCLES.

CHORUS.

ODE.

I.

How long, stern Mars, shall scenes of death inspire Aversion to the feasts gay Bacchus holds? Why join'st thou not the beauteous virgin choir Whose heaving bosoms love's first warmth unfolds, Thy hair's loose ringlets waving o'er thy face, Pleased on some amorous theme the lute t'employ, Dear to the Graces, dear to social joy? But thou, a foe to the devoted race Of Thebé, lead'st these Argives to their fields, Forming dire preludes for a tragic dance; Nor with the god whose hand the thyrsus wields, In dappled skins of hinds dost thou advance;

Exulting in the thong and harnessed steeds,
Thou driv'st thy chariot o'er Ismenos' meads,
And 'gainst th' invaders, in each Theban breast
Infusing equal rancour, promp'st that band,
Seed of the dragon's teeth, to take their stand;
These rush to guard the walls, and those t' invest.
Inhuman goddess, Discord, to the kings
Of Labdacus' house a train of misery brings.

II.

With sacred foliage ever clad, ye groves Of famed Cithæron, whose steep cliffs abound With sylvan game, thou mount where Dian loves To urge through drifted snows the rapid hound, Thou ought'st not to have nourished in thy shade Jocasta's son; then better had he died When, cast forth from the palace, on thy side In glittering vest the royal child was laid: Nor ought the Sphynx, the curse of these domains, That subtle virgin, to have winged her way From thy proud heights with inauspicious strains; Armed with four talons, clenched to rend her prey, These walls approaching, high into the air The progeny of Cadmus did she bear, By Pluto sent from hell, 'gainst Thebes she came. New woes the sons of Œdipus await, Again this city feels the scourge of fate, For virtue springs not from the couch of shame; Fruits of th' incestuous womb, their sire's disgrace, Are these devoted youths, accurst and spurious race.

III.

Erst thy teeming soil gave birth
(As in barbaric accents was made known
To us by the loud voice of fame),
O Thebes, to that illustrious brood of earth,
Sprung from the teeth of that slain dragon sown,
Thy realm their prowess did adorn.
In honour of Harmonia's bridal morn,
To this favoured region came

All the celestial choir, What time the turrets, which this grateful land Impregnable by human force esteems, Reared by the harp, and not the artist's hand. Obedient to Amphion's lyre,

Arose amidst the fruitful meads
Where gentle Dirce leads

Her current, and Ismenos' waters yield Abundant verdure to the field

Encompassed by their streams.

She, whom a heifer's hornéd front disguised,

To was mother to the Theban kings:

Io, was mother to the Theban kings:
Successively, each bliss by mortals prized,
Hath to this city given renown,

And hither still fair victory brings
The noblest meed of war, the laurel's deathless crown.

TIRESIAS, MENÆCEUS, CREON, CHORUS.

Tiresias [to his daughter Manto.] Lead on; for thou, my daughter, to the feet

Of thy blind father, prov'st an eye as sure
As to the mariners the polar star.
Place me where I on level ground may tread,
And go before, lest we both fall: thy sire
Is feeble. In thy virgin hand preserve
Those oracles which I in former days
Received, when from the feathered race I drew
My auguries, and in the sacred chair
Of prophecy was seated. Say, thou youth
Menæceus, son of Creon, through the city
How far must I proceed before I reach

Thy father, for my knees can scarce support me,
And though full oft I raise these aching feet,
I seem to sain no ground

I seem to gain no ground.

Creon.

Be of good cheer,
Tiresias, for with well-directed step
Already have you reached your friend. My son,
Support him: for the chariot, and the foot
Of an infirm old man, is wont to need
The kind assistance of some guiding hand.

Tiresias. No matter. I am here. Why with such haste,
O Creon, call'st thou me?

Creon. I have not yet Forgotten: but till your exhausted strength

Can be recovered after the fatigue Of your long march, take breath.

Tiresias. With wearied step

I yesterday came hither from the realm Of Athens, for there also was a war Against Eumolpus, o'er whose troops I caused The dauntless race of Cecrops to prevail: Hence I possess the golden crown thou seest, As a first fruit selected from the spoils Of foes discomfited.

Creon. That crown I deem

An omen of success. You know the storm Which threatens us from yonder Argive host And what a mighty conflict now impends O'er the inhabitants of Thebes. Our king Eteocles, in brazen arms arrayed, To face Mycene's squadrons is gone forth, But hath with me a strict injunction left, To learn of you what can with most effect By us be done the city to preserve.

Tiresias. This mouth, I on Eteocles' account Still closing, would for ever have suppressed Heaven's dread response, but will to thee unfold it Since 'tis thy wish to hear. This land, O Creon, Hath been diseased since Laius 'gainst the will Of Heaven became a father, and begot The wretched Œdipus, his mother's husband, Whose eyes, torn out by his own hand, the gods Wisely ordained should to all Greece afford A dread example; which, in striving long To cover from the knowledge of the world, His sons, as if they thought to have escaped Heaven's eye, with a presumptuous folly sinned: For to their father yielding no respect, Nor loosing him from prison, they embittered The anguish of a miserable man: At once afflicted by disease and shame. Those horrid execrations he poured forth Against them both: "What have I left undone, Or what unsaid, though all my zeal but served To make me hated by th' unnatural sons

Of Œdipus?" But by each other's hand,

Them soon shall death o'ertake, O Creon; heaps On heaps of carnage cover all the plain, And Argive weapons mingling with the shafts Of Cadmus' race, through the whole Theban land Cause bitter plaints. Thou too, O wretched city, Shalt be destroyed, unless my counsels meet With one who will obey them. What were most To be desired were this: that none who spring From Œdipus should here reside, or hold The sceptre of this land, for they, impelled By the malignant demons, will o'erthrow The city. But, since evil thus prevails O'er good, one other method yet remains To save us. But unsafe were it for me Such truths to utter, and, on bitter terms, Must they whom Fate selects their country heal. I go: farewell! I, as a private man, Shall suffer, if necessity ordain, With multitudes, the evils which impend: For how can I escape the general doom?

Creon. Here tarry, O my venerable friend.

Tiresias. Detain me not.

Creon. Stay; wherefore would you fly? Tiresias. It is thy fortune which from thee departs.

And not Tiresias.

Creon. By what means, inform me,
Can Thebes with its inhabitants be saved?

Tiresias. Though such thy wish at present, thou ere long

Wilt change thy purpose.

Creon. How can I be loth
To save my country?

Tiresias. Art thou anxious then

Creon. What ought I to pursue

With greater zeal?

Tiresias. Thou instantly shall hear
The oracles Heaven sends me to unfold:
But first assure me where Menæceus is,
Who led me hither.

Creon. At your side he stands.

Tiresias. Far hence let him retire, while I disclose

To thee the awful mandate of the gods.

Creon. My son with th' utmost strictness will observe The silence you enjoin.

Tiresias. Is it thy will

That in his presence I to thee should speak?

Creon. Of aught that could preserve his native land. He with delight would hear.

Tiresias. Then, to the means

Which through my oracles are pointed out, Yield due attention; for by acting thus Ye shall preserve this city, where the race Of Cadmus dwell; thou, in thy country's cause, Thy son Menæceus art ordained to slay: Since thou on me importunately call'st The dread behest of fortune to unfold.

Creon. What say you? How unwelcome are these words, O aged man!

I only speak of things Tiresias. Tust as they are; and add, thou must perform Th' injunction.

How much evil have you uttered Creon. In one short moment!

Tiresias.

Though to thee unwelcome, Yet to thy country fame and health.

Your words Creon. I hear not, nor your purpose comprehend:

The city I abandon to its fate.

Tiresias. His purpose he retracts, and is no longer The man he was.

Depart in peace; I need not Creon. Your oracles.

Hath truth then lost its merit, Tiresias.

Because thou art unhappy?

By those knees, You I implore, and by those hoary locks.

Tiresias. Why sue to me? The ills 'gainst which thou pray'st

Are not to be avoided.

Peace! Divulge not Creon.

In Thebes these tidings.

Dost thou bid me act Tiresias. Unjustly? Them I never will suppress.

Creon. What is your purpose, to destroy my son?

Tiresias. Let others see to that: I only speak As Heaven ordains.

But whence was such a curse

Creon. On me and on my progeny derived? Tiresias. Well hast thou asked this question, and a field For our debate laid open. In you den, Where erst the guard of Dirce's fountain lay, That earth-born dragon, must the youth pour forth His blood for a libation to the ground, And expiate by his death the ancient hate To Cadmus borne by Mars, who thus avenges The progeny of earth, the dragon, slain: This done, the god of battles will become Your champion; and when earth shall, in the stead Of her lost fruit the dragon, have received The fruit of that heroic race who sprung From its own teeth, and human blood for blood, Propitious shall ve find the teeming soil, Which erst, instead of wheat, produced a crop Of radiant helms. Die then some victim must Who from the jaws of that slain dragon sprung: But thou alone in Thebes remain'st who thence Deriv'st thy birth unmixed, both by thy sire And by the female line; thence, too, descend Thy generous sons: but Hæmon must not bleed, Because he is espoused, nor in a state Of pure celibacy doth still remain, For he possesses an affianced bride, Although he be a stranger to her bed. But, for the city, if this tender youth Shall as a chosen victim be devoted. He by his death will save his native land, Will cause Adrastus and his Argive host With anguish to return, before their eyes Placing grim death, and add renown to Thebes. From these two fortunes make thy choice of one, Whether thy son or city thou wilt save. Thou hast heard all I had to say in answer To thy inquiries. Daughter, lead me home. Unwise is he who practises the art Of divination; for if he announce

Evils to come, he is abhorred by those

Who hear him; but, through pity, if he utter Untruths that please, he sins against the gods. Phœbus alone, who cannot fear the hate Of man, his own responses should pronounce.

[Exit TIRESIAS.

Chorus. What means this silence? Wherefore hast thou closed

Thy mouth, O Creon? But I too am smitten With equal terror.

Creon, With equal terro

How can a reply Be made to such proposal? What I mean To say is evident. To such a pitch Of woe may I ne'er come as to resign My son to bleed for Thebes! In all mankind The love they bear their children is as strong As that of life; nor is there any father Who for a victim will yield up his son. May no man praise me on such terms as slaying Those I begot! I stand prepared to die, For I am ripe in years, and would for Thebes Make due atonement with my streaming gore. But, O my son, ere the whole city know, Regardless of that frantic prophet's voice, Fly from this land, fly with your utmost speed He will proclaim the oracle to those Who wield the sceptre, or lead forth our troops To battle, visiting each chieftain stationed At the seven gates: if haply we with him Can be beforehand, you may yet be saved; But if you loiter, we are both undone. And you must die.

Menæceus. But whither, to what city,

What hospitable stranger speed my flight? Creon. As far as possible from these domains.

Menaceus. You ought to name a place for my retreat,

And I must execute what you command. Creon. Passing through Delphi—

Menæceus. Whither, O my sire

Must I proceed?

Creon. To the Ætolian land,

Menæceus. But whither thence shall I direct my course

Creon. Next to Thesprotia.

Menæceus. Where Dodona rears

Her hallowed grove.

Creon. Full well you comprehend

My meaning.

Menæceus. There what safeguard shall I find? Creon. Its tutelary god your steps will guide.

Menæceus. But how shall I with treasures be supplied?

Creon. To you will I convey abundant gold.

Menæceus. Discreetly have you spoken, O my sire.

Creon. Now leave me.

Menæceus. To your sister I would go-

I mean Jocasta, who first nurtured me
In infancy, when of my mother reft
An orphan I became; one fond adieu
To her I fain would bid, and of my life

Then take due care.

Creon. But go, or you will frustrate

All I can do to save you.

[Exit CREON.

Menæceus.

With what art, O virgins, have I soothed my father's fears, By specious words (my promise to accomplish) Deceiving him who sends me hence, to rob The city of those fortunes which await her, And brand me with a coward's hateful name. In an old man such weakness claims excuse: But I should sin beyond all hopes of pardon If I betrayed the land which gave me birth. I go, to save this city; be assured, Such are the terms on which I yield up life, Content to perish in my country's cause. If they whom Heaven's oracular response Leaves at full liberty, by no decrees Of the resistless destinies impelled, Maintain their ground in battle, nothing loth To bleed, the champions of their native land, Before you turrets, base were it in me, If proving faithless to my sire, my brother, And country, like a dastard, I should speed My flight from these domains; where'er I live. Shame would o'ertake me. From the starry pole May Tove forefend, and Mars, in human gore

Exulting, who the sceptre of this realm
Erst gave to kings, earth's progeny, the seed
Of that slain dragon's teeth. But I will go,
Ascend the topmost pinnacles, and piercing
My breast, where they o'erhang the dragon's cave,
The very spot the seer described, redeem
My country from its foes. I have pronounced
Th' irrevocable word. But, by my death,
On Thebes no sordid present to bestow,
I haste, and from these mischiefs will set free
The groaning land. Would every man exert
To their full stretch his talents to promote
The public interest, every state, exposed
To fewer ills, hereafter might be blest.

Exit MENÆCEUS.

CHORUS.

ODE.

I.

O winged fiend, who from the earth
And an infernal viper drew'st thy birth,
Thou cam'st, thou cam'st, to bear away,
Amidst incessant groans, thy prey,
And harass Cadmus' race,
Thy frantic pinions did resound,

Thy fangs impressed the ghastly wound, Thou ruthless monster with a virgin's face: What youths from Dirce's fount were borne aloof, While thou didst utter thy discordant song,

The furies haunted every roof,
And o'er these walls sat slaughter brooding long.
Sure from some god whose breast no mercy knew
Their source impure these horrors drew.

From house to house the cries
Of matrons did resound,

And wailing maidens rent the skies
With frequent shrieks loud as the thunder's burst,
Oft as the Sphinx accurst,

Some youth, whom in the Theban streets she found, Bore high in air; all gazed in wild affright,

Till she vanished from their sight.

II.

At length the Pythian god's command Brought Œdipus to this ill-fated land; Each heart did then with transport glow Though now his name renew their woe:

Though now his name renew their woe By angry Heaven beguiled,
When he th' enigma had explained
His mother for a bride he gained;
With incest hence the city was defiled.
Fresh murders soon his curses will inspire,
Urging his sons to an unnatural strife.

We that heroic youth admire Who in his country's cause resigns his life, He, though his father Creon wail his fate,

With triumph in the fell debate,
Will crown these sevenfold towers.

Of Heaven I ask no more
Than that such children may be ours:
Thy aid, O Pallas, in th' adventurous deed
Caused Cadmus to succeed

Caused Cadmus to succeed,
And slay the dragon, whose envenomed gore
Was sprinkled on these rocks; by Heaven's command
Hence some pest still haunts the land.

MESSENGER, CHORUS.

Messenger. Who at the portals of the regal dome
Is stationed? Open, bring Jocasta forth
From her apartment. Ho! advance at length,
And listen to my voice, illustrious wife
Of Œdipus. No longer grieve, nor shed
The piteous tear.

JOCASTA, MESSENGER, CHORUS.

Jocasta. Come you, my friend, to bring
Sad tidings of Eteocles the slain,
Beside whose shield you ever stood to guard
The warrior from the javelins of the foe?
With what important message are you charged?
Is my son dead, or lives he? Tell me all.
Messenger. He lives, that fear be banished.

Jocasta. Are our walls

By their seven towers secured?

Messenger. They still remain

Unshaken, and the city is not sacked.

Jocasta. Have they withstood the perilous assault From th' Argive combatants?

Messenger. The fate of battle

Is just decided: the intrepid race

Of Cadmus o'er Mycene's host prevailed.

Jocasta. Yet one thing more; I by th' immortal powers
Conjure you, tell me whether you know aught
Of Polynices, for I wish to learn
If he yet live.

Messenger. At present both thy sons

Are living. Jocasta.

Bliss attend you: but inform me How ye the troops of Argos from the gates, Beleaguered in the turrets, could repel? That to my home with speed I may return, The blind and aged Œdipus to soothe With the glad tidings that this city's saved.

Messenger. Since Creon's son, who for his country died, Mounting the topmost pinnacles, transpierced His bosom with the falchion, and became The generous saviour of his native land Eteocles distributed seven cohorts At the seven gates, and to each band assigned Its leader, by their vigilance to check The furious onset of the Argive host: He stationed a reserve of horse to succour The horse, and infantry with bucklers armed Behind the infantry, that where the walls Were with the greatest violence assailed Fresh strength might be at hand. As on our turrets We stood exalted, and o'erlooked the plain, The Argive host we saw, with silver shields Conspicuous, from Teumessus' mount descend: Over their trenches in their rapid march Soon vaulting, to the city they drew near, While pæans, mingled with the trumpet's sound, At the same instant through their ranks were heard, And on the Theban walls. His squadron, first,

By their raised targets screened, which cast around A horrid shade, to the Nëitian gate Parthenopæus led, the daring son Of Atalanta; on his central shield, His mother's trophy, the Ætolian boar, Pierced by that huntress with unerring shaft. The chief displayed. Amphiareus the seer Marched to the gates of Prætus, on his car Conveying victims: no unseemly pride In his armorial bearings was expressed, But on his modest buckler there appeared At the Ogygian portals A vacant field. The fierce Hippomedon maintained his stand. By this achievement was his orbéd targe Distinguished: Argus, with unnumbered eyes. A part of which, awakening fresh from sleep, Oped with the rising stars, meantime the rest He with the setting constellations closed: As more distinctly, when the chief was slain, Might be discerned. But Tydeus next his post Before the Homolæan gate maintained: With a huge lion's bristly hide his shield Was covered, in his better hand a torch He, like Prometheus of the Titans' race. Brandished to fire the city. To the gate From Dirce's fountain named his marshalled troops Thy son the furious Polynices led; The rapid mares of Potnia (the device Portrayed upon his target) seemed to leap With panic terrors smitten, and, grown frantic. All crowded in a circle to the rim. Equal in courage to the God of War. Next with his cohort to Electra's gate Rushed Capaneus: the ensign wrought in steel Upon his buckler was an earth-born giant, Whose shoulders carried a whole city torn With levers from its basis, to denote The menaced fate of Thebes. Adrastus' self At the seventh gate appeared; on his left arm The Hydra with a hundred snakes begirt, Which filled the convex surface of his shield, That badge of Argive pride, the warrior bore

From Thebes, surrounded by its lofty walls, The serpents opening their voracious jaws Conveyed the sons of Cadmus. Each device I could observe securely, as I passed Betwixt the leaders of the adverse hosts. Distinguished by the pledge of truce. At first We at a distance fought with bows and shafts And slings and stones; but when our troops obtained An easy conquest in this missile war, Tydeus, and Polynices, thy brave son, Both cried at the same instant, "O ye race Of Danaus, ere our squadrons are dispersed By weapons from yon lofty turrets hurled, Why on the portals scruple ye to make One resolute assault with all our strength, The light-armed troops, our horse, and brazen cars?" Soon as they heard their leader's cheering voice. None loitered, but full many a valiant Argive Was through the brain transpierced, while from the walls.

Like skilful divers, our expiring friends Oft threw themselves; the thirsty ground with streams Of gore they drenched. Fierce Atalanta's son, Not Argos, but Arcadia gave him birth, Rushed like a whirlwind to the gates, and called For flaming brands and axes to destroy; But Periclimenus, who from the god Of ocean sprung, soon quelled his frantic rage: Torn from the battlement, a stone, whose mass Had filled a chariot, on his head he threw, The stripling's auburn hair and crashing skull It severed, and those rosy cheeks defiled With gushing blood; to the maternal arms Of her who twangs the unerring bow, the nymph Of Mænalon, he never shall return. But when thy son Eteocles surveyed Our triumphs at this gate, the rest with speed He visited; I followed, and beheld Tydeus attended by a phalanx armed With bucklers hurling their Ætolian spears Into the loftiest towers, with such success That they constrained our fugitives to quit

Their station on the ramparts; but thy son Rallied them like a hunter, and collected Each warrior to resume his post; their fears Dispelled, we hasted to another gate. But in what terms shall I describe the madness Of Capaneus? He with a ladder came, And boasted that not e'en the lightning launched By Jove's own hand should hinder him from scaling The towers to sack the city. Thus he spoke; And 'midst a storm of stones, from step to step Ascending, still sufficient shelter found Beneath the huge circumference of his shield; But as he reached the summit of the wall Jove smote him with a thunderbolt, earth gave A sound so loud that all were seized with terror: As from a sling his scattered limbs were thrown, His blasted tresses mounted to the skies, On earth his blood was sprinkled, but his hands And feet were, like Ixion on the wheel, Whirled with incessant motion, till at length Down to the ground he fell a smouldering corse. Soon as Adrastus saw Jove warred against him, He with his Argive host in swift retreat Again the trenches crossed: but when our troops Marked the auspicious sign vouchsafed by Jove, They from the gates rushed forth with brazen cars. With cavalry in ponderous arms arrayed, And 'midst the Argive squadrons hurled their spears: Each ill concurred to overwhelm the foe. Death raged amongst them, from their chariots thrown They perished, wheels flew off, 'gainst axle crashed Axle, and corses were on corses heaped. The Theban turrets we this day have saved From ruin, but to the immortal powers, And them alone, belongs it to decide Whether auspicious fortune on this land Shall smile hereafter.

Chorus.

In th' embattled field
'Tis glorious to prevail: but were the gods
More favourably disposed, I should enjoy
A greater share of bliss.

Jocasta.

The gods and fortune

Have amply done their part: for both my sons Are living, and the city hath escaped:
Unhappy Creon only seems to reap
The bitter fruits of my accursed nuptials
With Œdipus, for he hath lost his son,
And such event, though fortunate for Thebes,
To him is grievous. In your tale proceed.
Say on; what farther have my sons resolved?

Messenger. The sequel wave; for all with thee thus far Goes prosperously.

Jocasta. These words but serve to raise Suspicion: nothing must be left untold.

Messenger. What wouldst thou more than that thy sons are safe?

Jocasta. But whether my good fortune will prove lasting I wish to know.

Messenger. Release me: for thy son Is left without his shield-bearer.

Jocasta. Some ill
In mystic darkness wrapt you strive to hide.

Messenger. I to these welcome tidings cannot add
Such as would make thee wretched.

Jocasta.

Unless you through the air could wing your flight,
Have you to 'scape me.

Messenger.

After this glad message

Why wilt thou not allow me to depart, Rather than speak of grievous ills. Thy sons Are both resolved on a most impious deed: Apart from either army to engage In single combat, to the Argive troops And the assembled citizens of Thebes Have they addressed such language as ne'er ought To reach their ears. Eteocles began: Above the field high on a tower he stood, Commanding silence first to be proclaimed Through all the host, and cried: "O peerless chiefs Of the Achaian land, who, to invade This city, from the realms of Danaus come, And ye who spring from Cadmus, in the cause Of Polynices barter not your lives, Nor yet on my behalf; I from such dangers

To save you, with my brother will engage In single combat, and if him I slay Here in this palace shall I reign alone, But I to him the city will yield up If I am vanquished: from the bloody strife Desisting, ye to Argos shall return, Nor perish in a foreign land: enough Of Thebans too on this ensanguined plain Lie breathless corses." With these words his speech The dauntless chief concluded. From the ranks, Thy offspring, Polynices, then advanced And the proposal praised, while, with a shout, The Argive and the Theban hosts, who deemed Such combat just, their public sanction gave. Then was the truce agreed on; 'twixt both hosts The generals met, and by a solemn oath Engaged themselves the compact to fulfil. In brazen panoply, without delay The sons of aged Œdipus were clad; His friends, the noblest Theban youths, equipped The ruler of this land, the Argive chiefs Armed his antagonist; both stood conspicuous In glittering mail, their looks betrayed no change, And at each other's breast with frantic rage They longed to hurl the spear. Meantime their friends

Passed by, and with these words their courage roused:

"On thee, O Polynices, it depends
To rear an image of triumphant Jove,
And add fresh glories to the Argive state."
But to Eteocles they cried: "Thou fight'st
The battles of thy native land, obtain
A conquest and the sceptre will be thine."
Exhorting them to combat thus they spoke;
Meanwhile the seers the fleecy victims slew,
Drew forth the reeking entrails, and observed
Whether the flames by unpropitious damps
Were checked, or mounted in a spiral blaze,
The twofold signs of victory or defeat.
But if thou canst do aught by sage advice
Or magic incantation, go, dissuade

Thy sons from this accursed strife; the danger Is imminent, and horror must attend On such a conflict: with abundant tears Wilt thou bewail their fate if thou this day Of both thy sons are reft.

Jocasta. Come forth, my daughter,
Antigone, thy fortunes now are such
As will not suffer thee to lead the dance
Amid thy virgin train—thou, with thy mother,
Must hasten to prevent two valiant youths,
Thy brothers, rushing upon instant death,

Else will they perish by each other's hand.

Antigone, Jocasta, Chorus.

Antigone. Before these gates, my mother, with what sounds
Of recent horror com'st thou to alarm
Thy friends.

Jocasta. Ere now, my daughter, both thy brothers

Have lost their lives.

Antigone. What sayst thou?

Jocasta. They went forth

Resolved on single combat.

Antigone. Wretched me!

What more hast thou, O mother, to relate? *Jocasta*. Nought that can give thee joy, but follow me. *Antigone*. Say whither must I go, and leave behind

My virgin comrades?

Antigone.

Jocasta. To the host.

I blush

To mingle with the crowd.

These bashful fears

Are such as in thy present situation

Become thee not.

Antigone. How can my help avail?

Jocasta. Thou haply mayst appease this impious strife
Betwixt thy brothers.

Antigone. Mother, by what means?

Jocasta. By falling prostrate at their knees with me. Antigone. Lead on betwixt the van of either host,

This crisis will admit of no delay.

Jocasta. Haste, O my daughter, haste, for if my sons

I haply can prevent ere they begin

Th' accurst encounter, I shall yet behold
The blessed sun; but if I find them slain
With them will I partake one common grave.

[Exeunt JOCASTA and ANTIGONE.

CHORUS.

ODE.

T.

To whom the sad last tribute shall I pay, A breathless corse stretcht weltering on the field?

Ah, what boding horror throws
Chilling damps into my breast,
How is this whole frame opprest
By sympathetic pity for the woes
Of her who to those valiant youths gave birth:
But which of her loved children twain
His sword with kindred gore shall stain
(Avert it, righteous Jove, and thou, O genial earth!)
And in the strife a brother slay,
The stroke descending through his cloven shield?

TT. Woe to thee, thou Theban ground! Those twin lions fired with rage Couch their lances to engage, And stand prepared to aim the deadly wound, In evil hour the thought of single fight Entered their souls. While many a tear Shuddering with excess of fear, For them I vainly shed, their dirge will I recite, Though in a harsh barbaric strain; Their destined portion slaughter is at hand, Ere Phœbus sinks into the western main Their forfeit lives the furies shall demand, But I my warbled lamentations cease, For, with brow by clouds of grief o'ercast, Creon, approaching these abodes, I view.

CREON, CHORUS.

Creon. Ah me! shall I bewail my private woes
Or those of Thebes surrounded by such clouds

As Acheron exhales! My valiant son
Died for his country, an illustrious name
Obtaining, but to me a source of grief.
That self-devoted victim's mangled corse
I, from yon rock, the dragon's curst abode,
Wretch that I am, have in these hands just borne:
With lamentations my whole house resounds.
I, a forlorn old man, my aged sister
Jocasta come to fetch, that she may lave
And on the decent bier stretch forth the corse
Of my departed son. For it behoves
The living, by bestowing on the dead
Funereal honours, to adore the god
Who rules in hell beneath.

Chorus. From these abodes

O Creon, is your sister just gone forth, And on her mother's footsteps did attend The nymph Antigone.

Freon. Inform me, whither,
And to what scene of recent woe?

Chorus. She heard

Her sons by single combat were resolved Their contest for this palace to decide.

Creon. What sayst thou? I came hither but to grace
With due sepulchral rites my breathless son,
Nor of these fresh disasters thought to hear.

Chorus. 'Tis a long time, O Creon, since your sister
Went hence; ere now I deem the fatal strife
Betwixt the sons of Œdipus is ended.

Creon. Ah me! an evil omen I behold
In that deep gloom which overcasts the eyes
And visage of you messenger; he comes,
No doubt, the whole transaction to relate.

Messenger, Creon, Chorus.

Messenger. Wretch that I am! What language can I find? Creon. We are undone; for with a luckless prelude

Thy speech begins.

Messenger. I yet again exclaim,
Ah, wretched me! Most grievous are the tidings
I bring.

Creon. Of any farther ills than those

Which have already happened, wouldst thou speak Messenger. Your sister's sons, O Creon, are no more.

Creon. Great are the woos, alas! which thou relat'st,

To me and to this city.

Messenger. Hast thou heard,
O house of Œdipus, how both his sons

Partook one common fate?

Chorus. These very walls,

Were they endued with sense, would shed a tear. *Creon.* Oh, what a load of misery! wretched me!

Creon. Oh, what a load of misery! wretched me!

Messenger. Did you but know of your fresh ills—

Creon. Could fate

Have any ills more grievous in reserve?

Messenger. With her two sons your wretched sister's dead.

Chorus. In concert wake, my friends, the plaintive strain,

And smite your heads with those uplifted hands.

Creon. Hapless Jocasta, what a close of life

And wedlock, through th' enigma of the Sphinx,
Hast thou experienced! But how both her sons
Were slain in that dire contest, through the curses
Pronounced by Œdipus their injured sire,
Inform me.

Messenger. How Thebes triumphed o'er th' assailants, And her beleaguered turrets saved, you know; Nor are the walls so distant, but from thence Ere now those great events you must have heard. Soon as in brazen panoply the sons Of aged Œdipus were clad, they stood In the midway 'twixt either host, kings both, Of mighty hosts both chieftains, to decide This strife in single combat. Then his eyes Towards Argos turning, Polynices prayed: "O Juno, awful queen, for I became Thy votary since the daughter of Adrastus I wedded, and in his dominions found A habitation, grant that I may slay My brother, and with kindred gore distain In the dire conflict this victorious arm; For an unseemly wreath, nor to be gained Unless I take away the life of him Who springs from the same parents, I to thee

My vows address." Tears burst forth, in a stream Equal to the calamity they wailed, From multitudes, who on each other gazed. Eteocles, then turning to the fane Of Pallas, goddess of the golden shield, Exclaimed: "O daughter of imperial Tove, Grant me with vigorous arm a conquering spear To hurl against my brother's breast, and smite The man who comes to lay my country waste." But when Etruria's trumpet with shrill voice Had, like the kindled torch, a signal given The combat to begin, with dreadful rage Against each other rushing, like two boars Whetting their ruthless tusks, they fought till foam O'erspread their cheeks; with pointed spears they made

A furious onset; but each warrior stooped Behind his brazen target, and the weapon Was aimed in vain; whene'er above the rim Of his huge buckler either chief beheld The face of his antagonist, he strove To pierce it with his spear; but through the holes Bored in the centre of their shields they both With caution looked, nor could inflict a wound By the protended javelin. A cold sweat, Through terror for the safety of their friends, From every pore of those who viewed the fight, Far more than from the combatants, arose. But, stumbling on a stone beneath his feet, Eteocles had chanced to leave one leg Unguarded by his shield; then onward rushed Fierce Polynices with his lifted spear, And marking where he at the part exposed Most surely might direct the stroke, his ankle Pierced with an Argive weapon, while the race Of Danaus gave a universal shout. But in this struggle, when the chief who first Was wounded saw the shoulder of his foe Laid bare, he into Polynices' breast, His utmost force exerting, thrust his spear. Again the citizens of Thebes rejoiced; But at the point his weapon broke: disarmed

Backwards he sunk, and on one knee sustained The weight of his whole body; from the ground Meantime the fragment of a massive rock Uprearing, he at Polynices threw, And smote his shivered javelin. Of their spears Now both deprived on equal terms they fought With their drawn falchions hand to hand, the din Of war resounded from their crashing shields. Then haply to Eteocles occurred A stratagem in Thessaly devised, Which through his frequent commerce with that land He had adopted; from the stubborn fight, As if disabled, seeming to retire, His left leg he drew back, but with his shield Guarded his flank, on his right foot sprung forward, Plunged in the navel of the foe his sword, And pierced the spinal joint; his sides through pain Now writhing, Polynices fell, with drops Of gore the earth distaining. But his brother, As if he in the combat had obtained Decisive victory, casting on the ground His falchion, tore the glittering spoils away, Fixing his thoughts on those alone and blind To his own safety; hence was he deceived: For, still with a small portion of the breath Of life endued, fallen Polynices, grasping His sword e'en in the agonies of death, The liver of Eteocles transpierced. With furious teeth they rend the crimson soil, And prostrate by each other's side have left

Creon.

Much, alas! thy woes

Do I bewail, for by the strictest ties With thee, O Œdipus, am I connected; An angry god, too plainly it appears, Thy imprecations hath fulfilled.

The conquest dubious.

Messenger. What woes

Succeeded these, now hear. As both her sons
Expiring lay, with an impetuous step,
Attended by Antigone, rushed forth
The wretched mother: pierced with deadly wounds
Beholding them, "My children," she exclaimed,

"Too late to your assistance am I come." Embracing each by turns, she then bewailed The toil with which she at her breast in vain Had nurtured them. She ended with a groan, In which their sister joined: "O ye who cherished A drooping mother's age, my nuptial rites, Dear brothers, ere the hymeneal morn Have ye deserted." From his inmost breast Eteocles with difficulty breathed; His mother's voice, however, reached his ear, And stretching forth his clammy hand, no words Had he to utter, but his swimming eyes Shed tears expressive of his filial love. But Polynices, whose lungs still performed Their functions, gazing on his aged mother And sister, cried, "O mother, we are lost; I pity thee—my sister too I pity— And my slain brother, for although that friend Became a foe, this heart still holds him dear. But bury me, O thou who gav'st me birth, And my loved sister, in my native land Your mediation to appease the city Uniting, that of my paternal soil Enough for a poor grave I may obtain, Though I have lost the empire. Close these eyes With thy maternal hand" (her hand he placed Over his eyelids), "and farewell: the shades Of night already compass me around." Their miserable souls they both breathed forth At the same instant. When their mother saw This fresh calamity, no longer able The weight of her afflictions to sustain, She from the corses of her sons snatched up A sword, and an atrocious deed performed; For through her neck the pointed steel she drove, And lies in death 'twixt those she held most dear, E'en now embracing both. A strife of words Broke forth in the two armies: we maintained The triumph to our king belonged, but they To his antagonist. Amid the chiefs A vehement contention rose; some urged That Polynices' spear first gave the wound:

Others, that since both combatants were slain The victory still was dubious. From the lines Of battle now Antigone retired; They rushed to arms; but with auspicious forethought The progeny of Cadmus had not thrown Their shields aside; we in an instant made A fierce assault, invading by surprise The host of Argos yet unsheathed in mail; Not one withstood the shock, they o'er the field In a tumultuous flight were scattered wide: Gore streamed from many a corse of those who fell Beneath our spears. No sooner had we gained A victory in the combat, than some reared The statue of imperial Jove, adorned With trophies: others, stripping off the shields Of the slain Argives, lodged within the walls Our plunder: with Antigone, the rest Bring hither the remains of the deceased, That o'er them every friend may shed a tear, For to the city hath this conflict proved In part the most auspicious, but in part The source of grievous ills.

Chorus.

No longer are the miseries which this house
Have visited made public; at the gates
Are the three corses to be seen of those
Who, by one common death, have in the shades
Of everlasting night their portion found.

ANTIGONE, CREON, CHORUS.

Antigone. The wavy ringlets o'er my tender cheeks
I cease to spread, regardless of the blush
Which tinges with a crimson hue the face
Of virgins. Onward am I borne with speed
Like the distracted Mænades, not busied
In Bacchus' rites, but Pluto's, from my hair
Rending the golden caul, and casting off
The saffron robe; o'er the funereal pomp
(Ah me!) presiding. Well hast thou deserved
Thy name, O Polynices (wretched Thebes!),
For thine was not a vulgar strife, but murder
Retaliated by murder hath destroyed

The house of Œdipus; the source whence streamed Fraternal gore was parricide. But whom Shall I invoke to lead the tuneful dirge Or in what plaints, taught by the tragic Muse. Solicit yonder vaulted roofs to join With me in tears, while hither I conduct Three kindred corses smeared with gore, to add Fresh triumphs to that fury who marked out For total ruin the devoted house Of thee, O Œpidus, whose luckless skill That intricate enigma did unfold, And slay the Sphinx who chanted it? My sire, What Grecian, what Barbarian, or what chief In ancient days illustrious, who that sprung From human race, hath e'er endured such ills As thou hast done, such public griefs endured? Seated upon the topmost spray of oak, Of branching pine, the bird, who just lost Its mother, wakes a sympathetic song Of plaints and anguish: thus o'er the deceased Lamenting, I in solitude shall waste The remnant of my life 'midst gushing tears. O'er whom shall I first cast the tresses rent From these disfigured brows, upon the breasts Of her who with maternal love sustained My childhood, or my brothers' ghastly wounds? Ho! Œdipus, come forth from thy abode-Blind as thou art, my aged sire, display Thy wretchedness. O thou who, having veiled With thickest darkness those extinguished eyes, Beneath you roof a tedious life prolong'st: Hear'st thou my voice, O thou, who through the hall Oft mov'st at random, and as oft reliev'st Thy wearied feet on the unwelcome couch?

ŒDIPUS, ANTIGONE, CREON, CHORUS.

(Edipus. Why, O my daughter, hast thou called me forth, A wretch, who by this faithful staff supply

The want of sight, to the loathed glare of day,

From a dark chamber, where I to my bed

Have been confined, through those incessant tears

My woes extort, grown grey before my time,

And wasted by affliction, till I seem As unsubstantial as the ambient air, A spectre rising from the realms beneath, Or wingéd dream?

Prepare thyself to hear Antigone. The inauspicious tidings I relate:

Thy sons, thy consort too, the faithful staff Of thy blind footsteps and their constant guide, No longer view the sun. Alas, my sire!

Editus. Ah me! The woes I suffer call forth groans And shrieks abundant: but inform me how These three, O daughter, left the realms of light.

Antigone. Not to reproach thee, or insult thy woes, My father, but in sadness do I speak; Thy evil genius, laden with the sword, With blazing torches and with impious war, Rushed on thy sons.

Ah me! Œdipus.

Why groan'st thou thus? Antigone.

Œdipus. For my dear sons.

'Twould aggravate thy griefs, Antigone. If thou with eyesight wert again endued, The chariot of the sun, and these remains

Of the deceased, to view.

How both my sons Œdipus.

Have lost their lives is evident: but say, To what my consort owes her piteous fate?

Antigone. Her tears were seen by all; her breasts she bared A suppliant to her sons, whom, near the gate Electra, in the mead she found where springs

The lotus; like two lions for a den With spears had they been fighting: from their wounds. Now stiff and cold, scarce oozed the clotted gore, Which Mars for a libation had bestowed On ruthless Pluto: snatching from the dead A brazen sword, she plunged it in her breast:

Slain by the luckless weapon of her sons, Close to her sons thus fell she. On this day The god who wrought such horrors, O my sire,

Hath poured forth his collected stores of wrath On this devoted house.

Chorus.

This day hath proved

A source of many evils to the house Of Œdipus; may more auspicious fates On the remainder of his life attend!

On the remainder of his life attend!

Creon. Your lamentations cease, for it is time
To mention the interment of the dead.
But to my words, O Œdipus, attend:
Eteocles thy son hath to these hands
Consigned the sceptre of the Theban realm,
On Hæmon, at his nuptials with thy daughter
Antigone, to be bestowed in dower:
I for this cause no longer can allow thee
Here to reside: for in the clearest terms
Tiresias has pronounced that, while thou dwell'st
In these domains, Thebes never can be blest.
Therefore depart. Nor through a wanton pride,
Nor any hate I bear thee, do I hold
Such language, but because I justly dread

Thy evil genius will destroy this land. Edipus. How wretched from the moment of my birth Me hast thou made, O fate, if ever man Knew misery: ere I from my mother's womb Was to the light brought forth, Apollo warned The royal Laius with prophetic voice, That I, his future child, who 'gainst the will Of Heaven had been begotten, should become The murderer of my father. Wretched me! But soon as I was born he who begot Sought to destroy me, for in me a foe He deemed would view the sun: but 'twas ordained That I should slay him. While I yet was loth To guit the breast, he sent me for a prey To savage beasts; I 'scaped: but would to Heaven Cithæron had, for saving me, been plunged Into the fathomless and yawning gulf Of Tartarus! Fortune gave me for a servant To Polybus. But having slain my sire, Wretch that I am, my hapless mother's bed Ascending, thence did I at once beget Both sons and brothers: them have I destroyed By showering down on my devoted race The curses I inherited from Laius. Vet was not I by nature made so void

Of understanding as to form a plot 'Gainst my own eyesight or my children's lives, Unless some god had interfered. No more. What shall I do? Ah me! what faithful guide My feet, through blindness tottering, will attend? Tocasta the deceased? While yet she lived, I know she would. Or my two noble sons? They are no more. Have not I youth still left Sufficient to find means to gain me food? But where shall I procure it? Or why thus, O Creon, do you utterly destroy me? For you will take away my poor remains Of life, if you expel me from this land. Yet will not I, by twining round your knees These arms, put on the semblance of a dastard: For the renown I gained in days of yore, Though miserable, I never will belie. Creon. Thou with a manly spirit hast refused To clasp my knees; but in the Theban realm No longer can I suffer thee to dwell. Of the deceased, the one into the palace Must be conveyed; but as for him who came With foreign troops to lay his country waste, The corse of Polynices, cast it forth Unburied from the confines of this land. This edict, by a herald, to all Thebes Will I announce; whoe'er shall be detected Adorning with a garland his remains, Or o'er them scattering earth, shall be with death Requited: for, unwept and uninterred, He for a prey to vultures must be left. No longer, O Antigone, lament O'er these three breathless corses, but with speed To your apartment go, and there remain

Antigone.

O my sire. Into what hopeless misery art thou plunged! For thee far more than for the dead I moan; Thou hast not aught to make thy weight of woe Less grievous: the afflictions thou endur'st Are universal. But, O thou new king,

Amidst your virgin comrades till to-morrow,

When Hæmon's bed awaits you.

Of thee I ask, why dost thou treat my father With scorn, why banish him from Thebes, why frame

Harsh laws against a wretched corse?

Creon. Such counsels

Were by Eteocles, not me, devised.

Antigone. Devoid of sense are they; thou, too, art frantic Who these decrees obey'st.

Creon. Is it not just

To execute th' injunctions we receive?

Antigone. No, not if they are base and ill-advised.

Creon. What mean you? Can it be unjust to cast His body to the dogs?

Antigone. A lawless vengeance

Is this which ye exact.

Creon. Because he waged

An impious war against his native city.

Antigone. Hath not he yielded up his life to fate?

Creon. He shall be punished also in the loss

Of sepulture.

Antigone. Wherein, if he required

His portion of the realm, did he transgress? *Creon.* Know then he shall remain without a grave. *Antigone.* I will inter him, though the state forbid.

Creon. You shall be buried with him.

Antigone. For two friends

'Twere glorious in their death to be united. *Creon.* Seize and convey her home.

Antigone. I will not loose

My hold, nor shall ye tear me from his body.

Creon. O virgin, the decrees of fate are such As thwart your wayward views.

Antigone. It is decreed,

No insults shall be offered to the dead.

Creon. Over this corse let none presume to strew
The moistened dust.

Antigone. Thee, Creon, I implore By my loved mother, by Jocasta's shade.

Creon. In vain are your entreaties: such request I cannot grant.

Antigone. But suffer me to lave

The body—

Euripides

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Creon. I this interdict must add

To those which through the city are proclaimed.

Antigone. And close with bandages his gaping wounds.

Creon. To his remains no honours shall you pay.

Antigone. Yet, O my dearest brother, on thy lips

This kiss will I imprint.

Creon. Nor by these plaints

Make your espousals wretched.

Antigone. Dar'st thou think

That I will ever live to wed thy son?

Creon. You by necessity's superior force

Will be constrained. For how can you escape The nuptial bond?

Antigone. I on that night will act

Like one of Danaus' daughters.

Creon. Marked ye not

How boldly, with what arrogance she spoke? Antigone. Bear witness, O my dagger, to the oath. Creon. Why from this wedlock wish you to be freed? Antigone. My miserable father in his flight

I will attend.

Creon. A generous soul is yours
Abundant folly too.

Antigone. I am resolved

To share his death; of that, too, be assured. Creon. Go, leave this realm; you shall not slay my son.

Exit CREON.

Edipus. Thee, for thy zeal, my daughter, I applaud.

Antigone. How can I wed, while you my father roam

A solitary exile?

Œdipus. To enjoy

Thy better fortunes, stay thou here: my woes I will endure with patience.

Antigone. Who, my sire,
Shall minister to you deprived of sight?

Edipus. I, in whatever field the fates ordain

That I shall fall, must lie.

Antigone. Where's Œdipus,
And that famed riddle?

(Edipus. Lost, for ever lost: My prosperous fortunes from one single day,

And from one day my ruin I derive.

Antigone. May not I also be allowed to take A part in your afflictions?

Edipus. 'Twere unseemly
For thee, my daughter, from this land to roam
With thy blind father.

T-

Antigone. To a virtuous maid Not base, my sire, but noble.

Edipus. Lead me on.

That I may touch thy mother.

Antisone. Here she lies:

Clasp that dear object in your aged arms.

Œdipus. O mother, O my miserable wife!

Antigone. A piteous spectacle, o'erwhelmed at once By every ill.

Edipus. But where's Eteocles'
And Polynices' corse?

Antigone. Stretched on the ground Close to each other.

Edipus. A blind father's hand Place on the visage of each hapless youth.

Antigone. Lo, here they are! Stretch forth your hand, and touch

Your breathless sons.

Œdipus. Remains of those I loved,
The wretched offspring of a wretched sire.

Antigone. Thy name, O Polynices, shall thy sister
For ever hold most dear.

Edipus. Now, O my daughter,
The oracle of Phœbus is fulfilled.

Antigone. What oracle? Speak you of any woes We have not yet experienced?

Edipus. That in Athens
An exile I shall die.

Antigone. Where? In the realm

Of Attica, what turret shall receive you? Œdipus. Coloneus' fane, where Neptune's altars rise.

But haste, and minister with duteous zeal To thy blind father, since to share my flight Was thy most earnest wish.

Antigone. My aged sire,
Into a wretched banishment go forth:
O give me that dear hand, for I will guide

Your tottering steps, as prosperous gales assist The voyage of the bark.

Œdipus. Lo, I advance:

Do thou conduct me, O my hapless daughter.

Antigone. I am indeed of all the Theban maids
The most unhappy.

Œdipus. My decrepit feet

Where shall I place? O daughter, with a staff Furnish this hand.

Antigone. Come hither, O my sire.

Here rest your feet: for, like an empty dream, Your strength is but mere semblance.

Œdipus. Grievous exile.

A weak old man, he from his native land Drives forth. My sufferings are, alas! most dreadful.

Antigone. What is there in the sufferings you complain of Peculiarly distressful? Doth not justice Behold the sinner, and with penal strictness Each foolish action of mankind repay?

Œdipus. Still am I he whom the victorious Muse Exalted to the skies when I explained

The dark enigma by that fiend proposed.

Antigone. Why speak of the renown which you obtained
When you o'ercame the Sphinx? Cease to recount

Past happiness. For, O my sire, this curse
Awaited you, an exile from your country
To die we know not where. My virgin comrades

Leaving to wail my absence, I depart, Far from my native land ordained to roam

Unlike a bashful maid.

With matchless generosity endued!

Antigone. Such conduct 'midst my father's woes shall make

My name illustrious. Yet am I unhappy

Through the foul scorn with which they treat my brother,

Whose weltering corse without these gates is thrown Unburied. His remains, ill-fated youth,

Though death should be the punishment, with

I privately will cover, O my sire.

Edipus. Go join thy comrades.

Antigone. With loud plaints enough
Have I assailed the ear of every friend.

Edipus. But at the altars thou must offer up Thy supplications.

Antigone. They with my distress
Are satiated.

Edipus. To Bacchus' temple then
Repair, on that steep mountain where no step
Profane invades his orgies, chosen haunt
Of his own Mænades.

Antigone. Erst in the hides
Of Theban stags arrayed, I on these hills
Joined in the dance of Semele, bestowing
A homage they approved not on the gods.

Edipus. Illustrious citizens of Thebes, behold
That Œdipus, who the enigma solved—
The first of men when I had singly quelled
The Sphinx's ruthless power, but now o'erwhelmed
With infamy, I from this land am driven
A miserable exile. But why groan,
Why utter fruitless plaints? For man is bound
To bear the doom which righteous Heaven awards.

Chorus. O venerable victory, take possession

Of my whole life, nor ever cease to twine

Around these brows thy laureate wreath divine.

THE SUPPLIANTS

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

ÆTHRA.
CHORUS OF ARGIVE MATRONS.
THESEUS.
ADRASTUS.
HERALD.
MESSENGER.

EVADNE.
IPHIS.
A BOY, supposed to be MELON,
the son of ETEOCLUS.
MINERVA.

Scene. THE TEMPLE OF CERES, AT ELEUSINE, IN THE ATHENIAN TERRITORY.

ÆTHRA, CHORUS, ADRASTUS.

Æthra. Thou guardian power of Eleusine's land, O Ceres, and ye venerable priests Of that benignant goddess, who attend This temple, blessings for myself I crave, For my son Theseus, Athens, and the realm Of Pitheus, who, when his paternal care Had reared my childhood in a wealthy house, Gave me to Ægeus, to Pandion's son; So Phœbus' oracles decreed. These prayers I offered up when I you aged matrons Beheld, who their abodes at Argos leave, And with their suppliant branches at my knees Fall prostrate, having suffered dreadful woes: Now are they childless; for before the gates Of Thebes were slain their seven illustrious sons. Whom erst Adrastus, King of Argos, led To battle, when for exiled Polynices, His son-in-law, he strove to gain a share Of Œdipus' inheritance. The corses Of those who by the hostile spear were slain Their mothers would consign to earth; but, spurning The laws which righteous Heaven ordained, the victors Will not allow them to remove the dead. But needing equally with them my succour Adrastus, shedding many a tear, lies stretched On earth, bewailing the disastrous fate Of those brave troops whom he to battle led. Oft he conjures me to implore my son,

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Either by treaty, or his forceful spear, Back from those hostile fields to bring the slain And lodge them in a tomb: on him alone And Athens he this honourable task Imposes. Hither were the victims borne. That we a prosperous tillage may obtain, And for this cause I from my house am come Into this temple, where the bearded grain First rising from the fruitful soil appeared. Holding loose sprays of foliage in my hand. I wait before the unpolluted altars Of Proserpine and Ceres; for these mothers, Grown hoar with age and of their children reft, With pity moved, and to the sacred branches Yielding a due respect. I to the city Have sent a herald to call Theseus hither. That from the Theban land he may remove The causes of their sorrow, or the gods Appeasing by some pious rites, release me From the constraint these suppliant dames impose. In all emergencies discretion bids Our feeble sex to seek man's needful aid. Chorus. An aged woman prostrate at thy knees, Thee I implore my children to redeem, Who welter on a foreign plain, unnerved By death and to the savage beasts a prey: Thou seest the piteous tears which from these eyes Unbidden start, and torn with desperate hands My wrinkled flesh. What hope remains for me, Who neither, at my home, have been allowed The corses of my children to stretch forth, Nor, heaped with earth, behold their tombs arise? Thou, too, illustrious dame, hast borne a son Crowning the utmost wishes of thy lord, Speak, therefore, what thou think'st of our distress, In language suited to the griefs I feel For the deceased whom I brought forth; persuade Thy son, whose succour we implore, to march Across Ismenos' channel, and consign To me the bodies of the slaughtered youths, That I beneath the monumental stone May bury them with every sacred rite.

Though not by mere necessity constrained, We at thy knees fall down and urge our suit Before these altars of the gods, where smokes The frequent incense: for our cause is just: And through the prosperous fortunes of thy son, With power sufficient to remove our woes Art thou endued: but since the ills I suffer Thy pity claim, a miserable suppliant, I crave that to these arms thou would'st restore My son, and grant me to embrace his corse.

ODE.

Æthra. Here a fresh group of mourners stands, Your followers in succession wring their hands. Chorus. Attune expressive notes of anguish,

O ye sympathetic choir, And in harmonious accents languish, Such as Pluto loves t' inspire. Tear those cheeks of pallid hue, And let gore your bosoms stain, For from the living is such honour due To the shades of heroes slain, Whose corses welter on th' embattled plain.

II. I feel a pleasing sad relief, Unsated as I brood o'er scenes of grief; My lamentations, never ending, Are like the moisture of the sea In drops from some high rock descending, Which flows to all eternity. For those youths who breathe no more Nature bids the mother weep, And with incessant tears their loss deplore: In oblivion would I steep

THESEUS, ÆTHRA, ADRASTUS, CHORUS. Theseus. What plaints are these I hear? Who strike their breasts

My woes, and welcome death's perpetual sleep.

Attuning lamentations for the dead

In such loud notes as issue from the fane? Borne hither by my fears with wingéd speed, I come to see if any recent ill May have befallen my mother; she from home Hath long been absent. Ha! what objects new And strange are these which now mine eyes behold? Fresh questions hence arise: my aged mother Close to the altar seated with a band Of foreign matrons, who their woes express In various warbled notes, and on the ground, Shed from their venerable eyes a stream Of tears: their heads are shorn, nor is their garb Suited to those who tend the sacred rites? What means all this? My mother, say; from you I wait for information, and expect Some tidings of importance.

Athra.

O my son,
These are the mothers of those seven famed chiefs
Who perished at the gates of Thebes: you see
How they with suppliant branches on all sides
Encompass me.

Theseus. But who is he who groans
So piteously, stretched forth before the gate?

Ethra. Adrastus, they inform me, king of Argos.

Theseus. Are they who stand around those matrons' sons?

Ethra. Not theirs; they are the children of the slain.

Theseus. Why with those suppliant tokens in their hands

Come they to us?

Athra. I know: but it behoves
Them, O my son, their errand to unfold.
Theseus. To thee who in a fleecy cloak art wrapped,
My questions I address: thy head unveil,
Cease to lament, and speak; for while thy tongue
Utters no accent nought canst thou obtain.

Adrastus. O king of the Athenian land, renowned
For your victorious arms, to you, O Theseus,
And to your city, I a suppliant come.

Theseus. What's thy pursuit, and what is it thou need'st?

Adrastus. Know you not how ill-fated was the host

I led?

Theseus. Thou didst not pass through Greece in silence. Adrastus. The noblest youths of Argos there I lost.

Theseus. Such dire effects from luckless war arise.

Adrastus. From Thebes I claimed the bodies of the slain.

Theseus. Didst thou rely on heralds to procure

Leave to inter the dead?

Adrastus. But they who slew them

Deny this favour.

Theseus. What can they allege 'Gainst a request which justice must approve?

Adrastus. Ask not the reason: they are now elate With a success they know not how to bear.

Theseus. Art thou come hither to consult me then,

Or on what errand?

Adrastus. 'Tis my wish, O Theseus,
That you the sons of Argos would redeem.

That you the sons of Argos would redeem.

Theseus. But where is Argos now? Were all her boasts

Of no effect?

Adrastus. We by this one defeat

Are ruined, and to you for succour come.

Theseus. This on thy private judgment, or the voice

Of the whole city?

Adrastus. All the race of Danaus Implore you to inter the slain.

Theseus. Why led'st thou

'Gainst Thebes seven squadrons?

Adrastus.

To confer a favour

On my two sons-in-law.

Theseus. To what brave chiefs

Of Argos didst thou give thy daughters' hands?

Adrastus. My family in wedlock I with those

Of our own nation joined not.

Theseus. Didst thou yield

Those Argive damsels to some foreign bridegrooms?

Adrastus. To Tydeus, and to Polynices, sprung From Theban sires.

Theseus. What dotage could induce thee To form alliances like these?

Adrastus. Dark riddles

Phœbus propounded, which my judgment swayed

Theseus. Such union for the virgins to prescribe, What said Apollo?

Adrastus. That I must bestow My daughters on the lion and the boar.

Theseus. But how didst thou interpret this response
Of the prophetic god?

Adrastus. By night two exiles

Came to my door.

Theseus. Say, who and who: thou speak'st Of both at once.

Adrastus.

Together Tydeus fought

And Polynices.

Theseus. Hence didst thou on them

As on ferocious beasts bestow thy daughters?

Adrastus. Their combat that of savages I deemed.

Theseus. Why did they leave their native land?

Adrastus. Thence fled

Tydeus polluted with his brother's gore. Theseus. But why did Œdipus' son forsake

The Theban realm?

Adrastus. The curses of his sire

Thence drove him, lest his brother he should slay. *Theseus*. A prudent cause for this spontaneous exile

Hast thou assigned.

Adrastus. But they who stayed at home Oppressed the absent.

Theseus. Did his brother rob him

Of the inheritance?

Adrastus. I to decide

This contest went, and hence am I undone.

Theseus. Didst thou consult the seers, and from the altar Behold the flames of sacrifice ascend?

Adrastus. Alas! you urge me on that very point Where most I failed.

Theseus. Thou led'st thy troops, it seems,

Although the gods approved not, to the field.

Adrastus. Yet more, Amphiareus opposed our march.

Theseus. Didst thou thus lightly thwart the will of Heaven?

Adrastus. I by the clamorous zeal of younger men

Was hurried on.

Theseus. Regardless of discretion,

Thy courage thou didst follow.

Adrastus. Many a chief

Hath such misconduct utterly destroyed. But O most dauntless of the Grecian race, Monarch of the Athenian realm; I blush Thus prostrate on the ground, to clasp your knees, Grown grey with age, and once a happy king! But I to my calamities must yield. Redeem the dead, in pity to my woes, And to these mothers of their sons bereft, To whom the burdens which on hoary age Attend are added to their childless state. Yet hither they endured to come, and tread A foreign soil, though their decrepit feet Could hardly move: the embassy they bring Hath no connection with the mystic rites Of Ceres; all they crave is to inter-The slain, as they at their mature decease Would from their sons such honours have obtained. 'Tis wisdom in the opulent to look With pity on the sorrows of the poor, And in the poor man to look up to those Who have abundant riches, as examples For him to imitate, and thence acquire A wish his own possessions to improve. They too who are with prosperous fortunes blest Should feel a prudent dread of future woes; And let the bard who frames the harmonious strain Exert his genius in a cheerful hour, For if his own sensations are unlike Those which he speaks of, never can the wretch Who by affliction is at home opprest Give joy to others: there's no ground for this. But you perhaps will ask me: "Passing o'er The land of Pelops, why would you impose Such toil on the Athenians?" This reply Have I a right to make: "The Spartan realm Is prone to cruelty, and in its manners Too variable; its other states are small And destitute of strength; your city only To this emprise is equal, for 'tis wont To pity the distressed, and hath in you A valiant king; for want of such a chief Have many cities perished."

Chorus.

In the same language; to our woes, O Theseus, Extend thy pity.

Theseus.

I with others erst Have on this subject held a strong dispute; For some there are who say the ills which wait On man exceed his joys; but I maintain The contrary opinion, that our lives More bliss than woe experience. For if this Were not the fact, we could not still continue To view the sun. That god, who'er he was, I praise, who severed mortals from a life Of wild confusion and of brutal force, Implanting reason first, and then a tongue That might by sounds articulate proclaim Our thoughts, bestowing fruit for food, and drops Of rain descending from the skies, to nourish Earth's products and refresh the thirst of man, Yet more, fit coverings, from the wintry cold To guard us, and Hyperion's scorching rays; The art of sailing o'er the briny deep, That we by commerce may supply the wants Of distant regions, to these gifts by Heaven Is added; things the most obscure, and placed Beyond our knowledge, can the seer foretell, By gazing on the flames which from the altar Ascend the skies, the entrails of the victims, And flight of birds. Are we not then puffed up With vanity, if, when the gods bestow Conveniences like these on life, we deem Their bounty insufficient? Our conceit Is such, we aim to be more strong than Jove: Though pride of soul be all that we possess, We in our own opinion are more wise Than th' immortal powers. To me thou seem'st One of this number, O thou wretch devoid Of reason, to Apollo's mystic voice Yielding blind deference, who thy daughters gav'st To foreign lords, as if the gods were swayed By human passions. Thy illustrious blood With foul pollution mingling, thine own house Thus hast thou wounded. Never should the wise In leagues of inauspicious wedlock yoke Just and unjust: but prosperous friends obtain Against the hour of danger. Jove, to all

One common fate dispensing, oft involves In the calamities which guilt draws down Upon the sinner him who ne'er transgressed. But thou, by leading forth that Argive host To battle, though the seers in vain forbad, Despising each oracular response, And wilfully regardless of the gods, Hast caused thy country's ruin, overruled By those young men who place their sole delight In glory, and promote unrighteous wars, Corrupting a whole city; this aspires To the command of armies, by the pomp Attending those who hold the reins of power A second is corrupted; some there are Studious of filthy lucre, who regard not What mischief to the public may ensue. Three ranks there are of citizens: the rich, Useless, and ever grasping after more; While they, who have no property, and lack E'en necessary food, by fierce despair And envy actuated, send forth their stings, Against the wealthy, by th' insidious tongue Of some malignant demagogue beguiled; But of these three the middle rank consists Of those who save their country, and enforce Each wholesome usage which the state ordains. Shall I then be thy champion? What pretence That would sound honourably can I allege To gain my countrymen? Depart in peace! For baleful are the counsels thou hast given That we should urge prosperity too far.

Chorus. He did amiss: but the great error rests
On those young men, and he deserves thy pardon.

Adrastus. I have not chosen you to be the judge
Of my afflictions, but to you, O king,
As a physician come: nor, if convicted
Of having done amiss, to an avenger
Or an opprobrious censor, but a friend
Who will afford his help: if you refuse
To act this generous part, to your decision
I must submit: for what resource have I?
But, O ye venerable dames, retire,

Leaving those verdant branches here behind, And call to witness the celestial powers, The fruitful earth with Ceres lifting high Her torch, and that exhaustless source of light, The sun, that we by all the gods in vain Conjured you. (It is pious to relieve Those who unjustly suffer, and the tears Of these your hapless kindred are you bound To reverence, for your mother was the daughter Of Pitheus.) Pelops' son, born in that land Which bears the name of Pelops, we partake One origin with you: will you betray These sacred ties, and from your realm cast forth Yon hoary suppliants, nor allow the boon Which at your hands they merit? Act not thus; For in the rocks hath the wild beast a place Of refuge, in the altars of the gods The slave: a city harassed by the storm Flies to some neighbouring city: for there's nought On earth that meets with everlasting bliss.

Chorus. Rise, hapless woman, from this hallowed fane Of Proserpine, to meet him; clasp his knees, Entreat him to bestow funereal rites On our slain sons, whom in the bloom of youth Beneath the walls of Thebes I lost: my friends Lift from the ground, support me, bear along, Stretch forth these miserable, these aged hands. Thee, O thou most beloved and most renowned Of Grecian chiefs, I by that beard conjure, While at thy knees, thus prostrate on the ground, I for my sons, a wretched suppliant sue, Or, like some helpless vagabond, pour forth The warbled lamentation. Generous youth, Thee I entreat; let not my sons, whose age Was but the same as thine, in Thebes remain Unburied, for the sport of savage beasts! Behold what tears stream from these swimming eyes. As thus I kneel before thee, to procure For my slain sons an honourable grave.

Theseus. Why, O my mother, do you shed the tear,
Covering your eyes with that transparent veil?
Is it because you heard their plaints? I too

Am much affected. Raise your hoary head, Nor weep while seated at the holy altar Of Ceres.

Ah! F.thra.

You ought not thus to groan Theseus. For their afflictions.

O ve wretched dames! Æthra. Theseus. You are not one of them.

Shall I propose Athra. A scheme, my son, your glory to increase,

And that of Athens?

Wisdom oft hath flowed Theseus.

From female lips.

I meditated words Æthra.

Of such importance, that they make me pause. Theseus. You speak amiss, we from our friends should hide Nought that is useful.

Æthra. If I now were mute

> Myself hereafter might I justly blame For keeping a dishonourable silence, Nor through the fear lest eloquence should prove Of no effect, when issuing from the mouth Of a weak woman, will I thus forego An honourable task. My son, I first Exhort you to regard the will of Heaven, Lest through neglect you err, else will you fail In this one point, though you in all beside Think rightly. I moreover still had kept My temper calm, if to redress the wrongs Which they endure an enterprising soul Had not been requisite. But now, my son. A field of glory opens to your view, Nor these bold counsels scruple I to urge That by your conquering arm you would compel Those men of violence, who from the slain Withhold their just inheritance a tomb. Such necessary duty to perform, And quell those impious miscreants who confound The usages established through all Greece: For the firm bond which peopled cities holds In union is th' observance of the laws. But some there are who will assert "that fear

Effeminately caused thee to forego Those wreaths of fame thy country might have gained; Erst with a bristled monster of the woods Didst thou engage, nor shun th' inglorious strife: But now called forth to face the burnished helm And pointed spear art found to be a dastard." Let not my son act thus: your native land, Which for a want of prudence hath been scorned, You see, tremendous as a gorgon, rear Its front against the scorner: for it grows Under the pressure of severest toils. The deeds of peaceful cities are obscure, And caution bounds their views. Will you not march, My son, to succour the illustrious dead, And these afflicted matrons? For their safety I fear not, while with justice you go forth To battle. Though I now on Cadmus' sons Behold auspicious fortune smile, I trust They will ere long experience the reverse Of her unstable die: for she o'erturns All that is great and glorious.

Chorus.

Dearest Æthra,

Well didst thou plead Adrastus' cause and mine: Hence twofold joy I feel.

Theseus.

He hath deserved, O mother, the severe reproofs which flowed From my indignant tongue, and I my thoughts Of those pernicious counsels whence arose His ruin have expressed. Yet I perceive What you suggest, that ill would it become The character I have maintained to fly From danger. After many glorious deeds Achieved among the Greeks, I chose this office, An exemplary punishment t' inflict On all the wicked. Therefore from no toils Can I shrink back, for what would those who hate me Have to allege, when you who gave me birth, And tremble for my safety, are the first Who bid me enter on the bold emprise? I on this errand go, and will redeem The dead by words persuasive, or, if words Are ineffectual, with protended spear,

Euripides

And in an instant, if the envious gods Refuse not their assistance. But I wish That the whole city may a sanction give: They to my pleasure their assent would yield: But to the scheme, if I propose it first To be debated, I shall find the people More favourable: for them I made supreme, And on this city, with an equal right For all to vote, its freedom have bestowed. Taking Adrastus with me for a proof Of my assertions, 'midst the crowd I'll go, And when I have persuaded them, collecting A chosen squadron of Athenian youths, Hither return, and, halting under arms, To Creon send a message to request The bodies of the slain. But from my mother, Ye aged dames, those holy boughs remove, That I may take her by that much-loved hand, And to the royal dome of Ægeus lead. Vile is that son who to his parents yields No grateful services, for from his children He who such glorious tribute pays receives Whate'er through filial duty he bestowed.

CHORUS.

ODE.

I. I.

O Argos, famed for steeds, my native plain, Sure thou, with all Pelasgia's wide domain, Hast heard the king's benevolent design, And wilt in grateful strains revere the powers divine.

I. 2.

May Theseus put an end to all my woes, Rescuing those bloody corses from our foes Still objects of maternal love; his aid Shall by th' Inachian realm's attachment be repaid.

II. I.

To pious deeds belongs a mighty name, And cities saved procure eternal fame. Will he do this—with us in friendship join, And to the peaceful tomb our slaughtered sons consign!

II. 2.

Minerva's town, support a mother's cause, Thou from pollution canst preserve the laws Which man holds sacred, thou rever'st the right, Sett'st the afflicted free, and quell'st outrageous might.

THESEUS, ADRASTUS, CHORUS.

Theseus. [to a Herald.] Thou, always practising this art, has served

Thy city, and to various regions borne My embassies: when, therefore, thou hast crossed Asopus, and Ismenos' stream, address The Theban monarch in these courteous words: "Theseus, who dwells in an adjacent realm, And hath a right such favour to receive, Requests you as a friend t' inter the dead, And gain the love of all Erectheus' race." To this petition if they yield assent, Come back again in peace: if they refuse, Thy second message shall be this: "My band Of chosen youths in glittering mail arrayed They must expect: for at the sacred fount Callichore e'en now the assembled host Halts under arms, prepared for instant fight." For in this arduous enterprise, with zeal The city of its own accord engaged, When they perceived my wish. But who intrudes E'en while I am yet speaking? He appears To be a Theban herald, though I doubt it. Stay; for thy errand he may supersede, And by his coming obviate my designs.

THEBAN HERALD, THESEUS, ADRASTUS, CHORUS.

Theban Herald. Who is the sovereign ruler of this land?

To whom must I unfold the message sent
By Creon, who presides o'er the domains
Of Cadmus, since before Thebes' sevenfold gates,

Slain by his brother Polynices' hand, Eteocles expired?

With an untruth Theseus.

Thy speech, O stranger, hast thou oped by asking For a king here: for Athens, this free city, By no one man is governed, but the people Rule in succession year by year; to wealth No preference is allowed, but the poor man An equal share of empire doth possess.

Theban Herald. By yielding up this point, to me you grant

Advantage such as equals the first throw At dice: the city whence I came is ruled By one man only, not by multitudes; No crafty orator with specious words For his own interest turns the wavering minds Of its inhabitants, this moment dear To all around and lavish of his favours. The next a public bane, yet he conceals By some fresh calumny his errors past, And 'scapes the stroke of justice. How can they Who no sound judgments form, the people, guide A city well? For time instead of haste Affords the best instructions. But the man Who tills the ground, by poverty deprest, If to that poverty he add the want Of due experience, through the manual toils He is engaged in, to the public good Can ne'er look up. Those too of noble birth Are much disgusted when the worthless hold Posts of the highest rank, and he who erst Was nothing with his tongue beguiles the crowd.

Theseus. This witty herald to his message adds The flowers of eloquence. But on this strife Since thou hast entered, hear me; for 'tis thou That gav'st the challenge to debate. No curse Is greater to a city than a king. For first, where'er no laws exist which bind The whole community, and one man rules, Upon his arbitrary will alone Depend the laws, and all thy rights are lost. But under written laws the poor and rich An equal justice find; and if reproached,

They of low station may with equal scorn Answer the taunting arrogance of wealth: And an inferior, if his cause be just, Conquers the powerful. This too is a mark Of freedom, where the man who can propose Some wholesome counsel for the public weal Is by the herald called upon to speak: Then he who with a general zeal accepts Such offer gains renown, but he who likes not His thoughts to utter still continues mute. How can a city be administered With more equality? Where'er the people Are sovereigns of the land, a rising race Of heroes gives them joy; but these a king Esteems his foes; the brave, with those who bear The character of wise, he slays, still trembling For his ill-gotten power. How can that city On a firm basis stand where valiant youths, Like the green sheaf cut from the vernal mead, Are in their bloom mown down? Why then acquire Large fortunes for our children, to augment The treasures of a king? Or why train up Our virgin daughters with an anxious care, Merely to gratify the loose desires Of an imperious monarch, and cause tears To stream from their fond parents? May I end My life ere these indignant eyes behold The violation of my daughter's honour! Thus far in answer to thy speech. Now say, What claims hast thou to make on this domain? Wert thou not hither by thy city sent, Thou the impertinent harangues thou cam'st To utter shouldst bewail. A messenger When he hath spoken what his lords enjoin Ought to depart with speed. Next time let Creon A less loquacious messenger despatch To the Athenian land.

Alas! when fortune Chorus. Profusely showers her gifts upon the wicked, How insolent they are, as if they deemed They should for ever prosper! I will now

Theban Herald.

Speak what I have in charge; your thoughts indeed Differ from mine on these contested points, But I and all the Theban race pronounce This interdict: let not Adrastus enter The land, or if he be already here, Ere yon bright chariot of the sun descends, Regardless of these mystic branches borne By suppliant matrons, drive him from the realm, Nor furiously attempt to take away The slain by force, for in the Argive state You have no interest. If to my advice You yield due credence, by no boisterous waves O'ertaken in your course, you cross the deep Shall sail your nation's pilot, else the storm Of direful war shall burst on us and you, And your allies. Deliberate well, nor give A haughty answer, by my words provoked, And of the freedom of your city vain: For a reliance on superior might Is most pernicious, oft hath it embroiled Contending states, and roused immoderate ire For when whole cities by their votes decide In favour of a war, there's not a man Expects to perish; all avert the doom Which threats their own, upon another's head. But while they give their suffrages, if death Were present to their eyes, Greece ne'er had owed Its ruin to a frantic lust for war. We all know how to choose the better part, Distinguish good from ill, and are aware That peace, the benefactress of mankind. Is preferable to war; by every Muse Held justly dear, and to the fiends of hell A foe, in population she delights, And wealth abundant. But, these blessings slighting, We wickedly embark in needless wars; A man to servitude consigns the man His arms subdued, on city the same doom City imposes. But you aid our foes E'en after they are dead, and would inter With pomp funereal those who owe their fate To their own arrogance. Forsooth, you deem

That justice was infringed, when smoked the body Of frantic Capaneus, by thunder smitten, Upon that ladder, which he at the gates Erecting, swore he would lay waste our city, Or with dread Jove's consent or in despite Of the vindictive god: nor should th' abyss Have snatched away that Augur, swallowing up His chariot in the caverns of the earth: Nor was it fitting that those other chiefs Should at the gates lie breathless, with their limbs Disjointed by huge stones; boast that your wisdom Transcends e'en that of Jove himself, or own The gods may punish sinners. It behoves Those who are wise to love their children first. Their aged parents next, and native land, Whose growing fortunes they are bound t' improve. And not dismember it. In him who leads A host, or pilot stationed at the helm, Rashness is dangerous: he who by discretion His conduct regulates desists in time, And caution I esteem the truest valour.

Adrastus. The vengeance Jove inflicted on our crimes Should have sufficed: but it behoves not thee, Thou most abandoned miscreant, to insult us

With contumelious words.

Adrastus, peace! Theseus. Restrain thy tongue, and in my speech forbear To interrupt me: for this herald brings For thee no embassy, but comes to me, And I must answer. First will I confute The bold assertion which thou first didst make. I own not the authority of Creon. Nor can he by superior might enforce From Athens these submissions: to its source The river shall flow upward ere we yield To base compulsion. I am not the cause Of this destructive war: nor did I enter The realms of Cadmus with those armed bands, But to inter the bodies of the slain (No violence to Thebes, no bloody strife Commencing) is, I deem, an act of justice. And authorized by the established laws

Of every Grecian state. In what respect Have I transgressed? If from those Argive chiefs Ye suffered aught, they perished: on your foes With glory ye avenged yourselves, and shame To them ensued. No longer any right Have ye to punish. O'er the dead let dust Be strewn, and every particle revert Back to its ancient seat whence into life It migrated, the soul ascend to Heaven, The body mix with earth: for we possess By no sure tenure this decaying frame, But for a dwelling merely, through the space Of life's short day, to us doth it belong, And after our decease the foodful ground Which nourished should receive it back again. Think'st thou the wrong thou dost, when thou deniest Interment to the dead, confined to Argos? No; 'tis a common insult to all Greece, When of due obsequies bereft the slain Are left without a tomb: the brave would lose Their courage should such usages prevail. Com'st thou to threaten me in haughty strain, Yet meanly fear'st to let the scattered mould Cover the dead? What mischiefs can ensue? Will they, when buried, undermine your walls Or in earth's hollow caves beget a race Of children able to avenge their wrongs? Absurdly hast thou lavished many words In base and groundless terrors. O ye fools, Go make yourselves acquainted with the woes To which mankind are subject. Human life Is but a conflict: some there are whose bliss Approaches them, while that of others waits Till a long future season, others taste Of present joys: capricious Fortune sports With all her anxious votaries; through a hope Of better times to her the wretched pay Their homage; he who is already blest Extols her matchless bounty to the skies, And trembles lest the veering gale forsake him. But we, who know by what precarious tenure We hold her gifts, should bear a trifling wrong

With patience, and, if we the narrow bounds Of justice overleap, abstain from crimes Which harm our country. If thou ask, what

This prelude? I reply: To us who wish
To see them laid in earth with holy rites,
Consign the weltering corses of the slain,
Else is it clear what mischiefs must ensue,
I will go forth, and bury them by force.
For 'mong the Greeks it never shall be said
This ancient law, which from the gods received
Its sanction, though transmitted down to me
And to the city where Pandion ruled,
Was disregarded.

Chorus. Courage! While the light Of justice is thy guide, thou shalt escape Th' invidious censures of a busy crowd.

Theban Herald. May I comprise in a few words the whole Of our debate?

Theseus. Speak whatsoe'er thou wilt:
For no discreet restraint thy tongue e'er knew.

Theban Herald. The corses of those Argive youths from Thebes

You never shall remove.

Theseus. Now to my answer Attend, if thou art so disposed.

Theban Herald. I will:

For in your turn I ought to hear you speak. *Theseus*. On the deceased will I bestow a grave,

When I have borne their relics from the land Washed by Asopus' stream.

Theban Herald. In combat first Great hazards must you brave.

Theseus. Unnumbered toils

Have I ere now in other wars endured.

Theban Herald. Was there to you transmitted from your sire

Sufficient strength to cope with every foe?

Theseus. With every villain: for on virtuous deeds

No punishment would I inflict.

Theban Herald. Both you

And Athens have been wont in various matters

To interfere.

Theseus. To many a bold emprise

She owes the prosperous fortunes she enjoys.

Theban Herald. Come on, that soon as you attempt to enter Our gates the Theban lance may lay you low.

Theseus. Can any valiant champion from the teeth Of a slain dragon spring?

Theban Herald. This to your cost
Shall you experience, though you still retain
The rashness which untutored youth inspires.

Theseus. By thy presumptuous language thou my soul
To anger canst not rouse: but from this land
Depart, and carry back those empty words
With which thou hither cam'st: for we in vain
Have held this conference.

[Exit THEBAN HERALD. Now must we collect

Our numerous infantry in arms arrayed, With all who mount the chariot, and the steed Caparisoned, his mouth distilling foam, Urge to the Theban realm; for I will march Up to the sevenfold gates by Cadmus reared This arm sustaining a protended spear, And be myself the herald. But stay here, Adrastus, I command thee; nor with mine Blend thy disastrous fortunes: for the host I under happier auspices will lead To the embattled field, renowned in war, And furnished with the spear to which I owe My glories. I need only one thing more, Help from the gods, who are the friends of justice For where all these advantages concur They to our better cause ensure success. But valour's of no service to mankind Unless propitious Tove his influence lend.

[Exit THESEUS. Adrastus. Unhappy mothers of those hapless chiefs,

How doth pale fear disturb this anxious breast!

Chorus. What new alarm is this thou giv'st?

Adrastus.

The host

Of Pallas our great contest will decide.

Chorus. By force of arms, or conference, dost thou mean?

Adrastus. 'Twere better thus; but slaughter, the delight

Of Mars, and battle, through the Theban streets, With many a beaten bosom shall resound.

Chorus. Wretch that I am! What cause shall I assign
For such calamities?

Adrastus.

But some reverse

Of fortune may again lay low the man Who, swollen with gay prosperity, exults; This gives me confidence.

This gives me confidence.

Chorus. Th' immortal gods

Thou represent'st as if those gods were just.

Adrastus. For who but they o'er each event preside?

Chorus. Heaven's partial dispensations to mankind

I oft contemplate.

Adrastus. Thou thy better judgment

To thy past fears dost sacrifice. Revenge Calls forth revenge, and slaughter is repaid By slaughter; for the gods into the souls Of evil men pernicious thoughts infuse, And all things to their destined period guide.

ODE.

I.

Chorus. O could I reach you field with turrets crowned And leave thy spring Callichore behind.

Adrastus. Heaven give thee pinions to outstrip the wind! Chorus. Waft me to Thebes for its two streams renowned. Adrastus. There might'st thou view the spirits of the slain

Whose corses welter on the hostile plain.
Still dubious are the dread awards of fate.
But the undaunted king of this domain,

In you embattled field what dangers may await.

II.

Chorus.

On you, ye pitying gods, again I call, In you my trust I place, your might revere, And with this hope dispel each anxious fear. O Jove, whom love's soft bandage did enthral, When beauteous Io met thy fond embrace, Erst to a heifer changed, from whom we trace Our origin, make Argos still thy care. Thy image rescuing from its loathed disgrace, he forested pure these herees will me here.

To the funereal pyre these heroes will we bear.

MESSENGER, ADRASTUS, CHORUS.

Messenger. With many acceptable tidings fraught

I come, ye dames, and am myself just 'scaped (For I was taken prisoner in that battle,
When the seven squadrons, led by the deceased,
Upon the banks of Dirce's current fought);
It is my joyful errand to relate
The conquest Theseus gained: but your fatigue
Of asking tedious questions will I spare;
For to that Capaneus, th' ill-fated chief
Whom Jove with flaming thunderbolts transpierced,
Was I a servant.

Chorus. O my friend, you bring
A favourable account of your return,
And Theseus' mighty deeds: but if the host
Of generous Athens too be safe, most welcome
Will be the whole of what you now relate.

Messenger. 'Tis safe; and what Adrastus strove t' effect,
When from the stream of Inachus he led
His forces, and against the Theban towers
Waged war, is now accomplished.

Chorus.

But relate

How Ægeus' son with his intrepid comrades

Jove's trophies reared, for you the engagement saw,

And us who were not there can entertain.

Messenger. In a right line the solar beams began To strike the earth; upon a tower I stood Commanding a wide prospect o'er the field, Above the gate Electra. Thence I marked The warriors of three tribes to the assault Advancing in three several bands, arrayed In ponderous armour, to Ismenos' stream The first division, I am told, its ranks Extended; the illustrious son of Ægeus, Their monarch, was among them; round their chief The natives of Cecropia's ancient realm Were stationed; the Paralians, armed with spears. Close to the fount of Mars; on either flank Of battle stood the cavalry disposed In equal numbers, and the brazen cars Screened by Amphion's venerable tomb.

Meanwhile the Theban forces were drawn forth Without the bulwarks, placing in their rear The bodies which they fought for; fiery steed To steed; to chariot, chariot stood opposed. But Theseus' herald, in a voice so loud That all might hear, cried out, "Be mute, ye people; Attend in strictest silence, O ye troops Who spring from Cadmus! We are come to claim The bodies of the slain, which 'tis our wish To bury, in compliance with the laws Established through all Greece: we for their deaths Require not an atonement." To these words No answer by his herald Creon gave, Firm under arms the silent warrior stood. They who the reins of adverse chariots held Began the battle, hurrying through the ranks With glowing wheels, nor shunned the lifted spear; Some fought with swords, while others urged their steeds

Again into the fray, encountering those Who had repelled them. But when Phorbas, leader Of the Athenian cavalry, observed The chariots of the foe in throngs advance, He and the chieftains of the Theban horse In the encounter mingled, and by turns Prevailed and were discomfited. I speak not From fame alone, but what myself beheld, For I was present where the chariots fought, And the brave chiefs who in those chariots rode. In an assemblage of so many horrors, I know not which to mention first; how thick The clouds of dust which blackened all the sky Or those who, tangled in the stubborn reins, Were dragged at random o'er the field, and bathed In their own gore, their chariots overthrown Or broken; others headlong from their seat Were violently dashed upon the ground, And breathed their last amid their splintered wheels. When Creon saw his cavalry prevail, Hastily snatching up a pointed spear, Onward he marched impetuous, lest his troops Should lose their courage; nor through abject fear

Did Theseus' bands recoil: without delay On to the combat, sheathed in glittering arms, The dauntless chief advanced, and now began In the main body of each adverse host A universal conflict; with the slain The slaver mingled lay; while clamorous shouts Were heard from those that to their comrades cried: "Strike! With your spears oppose Erectheus' race." A legion sprung from the slain dragon's teeth With courage fought, and pressed on our left wing So hard that it gave way, while by our right Discomfited the Theban squadrons fled. Thus in an equal balance long remained The fate of war, but here again our chief Deserved applause, for he not only gained All that advantage his victorious troops Could give him, but proceeded to that wing Which had been worsted: with so loud a shout That earth resounded, "Valiant youths," he cried, "If ye repel not those portended spears Of the fierce dragon's brood, Minerva's city Is utterly destroyed." These words infused New confidence in all th' Athenian host. Then, snatching up the ponderous club he won Near Epidaurus, with his utmost force He swang that formidable weapon round, Severing, like tender poppies from the stalks,.. At the same stroke, their necks and helméd heads, Yet scarcely could he put to flight the troops Of Argos. With a shout, then vaulting high, I clapped my hands, while to the gates they ran. Through every street re-echoed mingled shrieks Of young and old, who by their fears impelled Crowded the temples. But when he with ease The fortress might have entered, Theseus checked The ardour of his host, and said he came Not to destroy the city, but redeem The bodies of those slaughtered chiefs. A man Like this should be selected for the leader Of armies, who 'midst dangers perseveres Undaunted, and abhors the madding pride Of those who, flushed with triumph, while they seek To mount the giddy ladder's topmost round, Forfeit that bliss they else might have enjoyed.

Chorus. Now I have seen this unexpected day,

I deem that there are gods, and feel my woes Alleviated since these audacious miscreants Have suffered their deserts.

Adrastus. Why do they speak

Of wretched man as wise? On thee, O Jove, Our all depends, and whatsoe'er thou will'st We execute. The power of Argos seemed Too great to be resisted: we relied On our own numbers and superior might. Hence, when Eteocles began to treat Of peace, though he demanded moderate terms. Disdaining to accept it, we rushed headlong Into perdition: while the foolish race Of Cadmus, like some beggar who obtains Immense possessions suddenly, grew proud, And pride was the forerunner of their ruin. Mortals, devoid of sense, who strain too hard Your feeble bow, and after ye have suffered Unnumbered evils justly, to the voice Of friends still deaf, are guided by events; And cities, who by treaty might avert Impending mischief, choose to make the sword, Rather than reason, umpire of your strife. But whither do these vain reflections tend? What I now wish to learn is, by what means Thou didst escape: I into other matters Will then make full inquiry.

Messenger. While the tumult
Of battle in the city still prevailed,
I through that gate came forth by which the troops

Had entered.

Adrastus. But did ye bear off the bodies Of those slain chiefs for whom the war arose?

Messenger. Who o'er seven noble houses did preside.

Adrastus. What's this thou saidst? But where are all the rest

Of the deceased, an undistinguished crowd? Messenger. Lodged in a tomb amid Cithæron's vale.

Adrastus. Beyond or on this side the mount? And who

Performed this mournful duty?

Messenger. Theseus' self:

The rock Eleutheris o'ershades their grave.

Adrastus. But as for those he hath not yet interred,

Where did he leave their corses?

Messenger. Near at hand.

For every duty that affection prompts Is placed within our reach.

Adrastus. Did slaves remove

The dead with their ignoble hands?

Messenger.

Performed that office: if you had been present
You would have cried, "What love doth Theseus bear
To our slain friends!" He laved the grisly wounds
Of these unhappy youths, the couch prepared,

And o'er their bodies threw the decent veil.

Adrastus. Most heavy burden! too unseemly task!

Messenger. What shame to feeble mortals can arise

From those calamities which none escape?

Adrastus. Ah! would to Heaven that I with them had died!

Messenger. In vain you weep, and cause full many a tear

To stream from these your followers.

Adrastus. Here I stand

As the chief mourner, though by them, alas! Have I been taught to grieve. Of that no more. With hands uplifted I advance to meet The dead, and, pouring forth a votive dirge To soothe hell's grisly potentate, once more Will I accost those friends, of whom deprived I wail my solitude. This only loss Man never can retrieve, the fleeting breath Of life; but the possessions we impair By various means may be again acquired.

Exit MESSENGER.

CHORUS.

ODE.

I.

Dashed are our joys with mingled pains;
While Athens and its leaders claim
Fresh wreaths of laurel with augmented fame;

Doomed to behold the pale remains Of my loved children, bitter, pleasing sight, I after grief shall feel an unforeseen delight.

II.

O that old Time's paternal care
Had kept me from the nuptial yoke.
What need had I of sons? This grievous stroke
Could never then have been my share:
But now I see perpetual cause to mourn;
My children, from these arms for ever are ye torn.

But lo! the corses of those breathless youths, Are borne in pomp funereal. Would to Heaven I with my sons might perish, and descend The shades of Pluto!

Adrastus. Matrons, o'er the dead,
Pale tenants of the realms beneath, now vent
Your loudest groans, and to my groans reply.
Chorus. O children, whom in bitterness of soul,

With a maternal fondness, we accost;
To thee, my breathless son, to thee I speak.

Adrastus. Ah me! my woes! Chorus.

We have endured, alas!

Afflictions the most grievous.

Adrastus. O ye dames
Of my loved Argos, view ye not my fate?

Chorus. Me, miserable and childless they behold.

Adrastus. Bring to their hapless friend each bloody corse

Of those famed chiefs, dishonourably slain,

And by the hands of cowards: when they fell,

The battle ended.

Chorus. O let me embrace

My dearest sons, and in these arms sustain!

Adrastus. Thou from these hands receiv'st them: such a

weight

Of anguish is too grievous to be borne.

Chorus. By their fond mothers, you forget to add.

Wretch that I am!

Adrastus. Ah, listen to my voice. Chorus. Both to yourself and us these plaints belong.

Adrastus. Would to the gods that the victorious troops
Of Thebes had slain and laid me low in dust!

Chorus. O that in wedlock I had ne'er been joined To any lord!

Adrastus. Ye miserable mothers

Of those brave youths, who for their country died, An ocean of calamity behold.

Chorus. We, hopeless mourners, with our nails have torn
These bleeding visages, and on our heads
Strewn ashes.

Adrastus. Ah! ah me! Thou opening ground

Swallow me up. O scatter me, ye storms; And may Jove's lightning on this head descend!

Chorus. You witnessed in an evil hour the nuptials
Of your two daughters, in an evil hour
Apollo's mystic oracles obeyed.
The wife whom you have taken to your arms
Is that destructive fiend who left the house
Of Œdipus, and chose with you to dwell.

THESEUS, ADRASTUS, CHORUS.

Theseus. The questions I designed to have proposed
To you, ye noble matrons, when ye uttered
Your loud complaints amidst th' assembled host,
I will omit, and mean to search no farther
Into the moving history of your woes.
But now of thee, Adrastus, I inquire,
Whence sprung these chiefs whose prowess did
transcend

transcend
That of all other mortals? Thou art wise,
And these transactions, which full well thou know'st,
Canst to our youthful citizens unfold.
For, of their bold achievements, which exceed
The power of language to express, myself
Have been a witness, when they strove to storm
The Theban walls. But lest I should provoke
Thy laughter, this one question will I spare;
With what brave champion in th' embattled field
Each fought, and from the weapon of what foe
Received the deadly wound: for these vain tales
But serve an equal folly to display

In those who either hear them, or relate,

Should he who mingles in the thickest fray,
From either army, while unnumbered spears
Before his eyes are thrown, distinctly strive
To ascertain what dauntless warrior launched
With surest aim the missile death. These questions
I cannot ask, nor credit those who dare
To make such rash assertions. For the man
Who to his foes in combat stands opposed
Can scarce discern enough to act the part
Which his own duty calls for.

Adrastus. Now attend,

For no unwelcome task have you imposed On me, of praising those departed friends, Of whom with truth and justice I would speak. Do you behold you hero's graceful form, Through which the bolt of Jove hath forced its way? This youth is Capaneus, who, though the fortune Which he possessed was ample, ne'er grew vain Through wealth, nor of himself more highly deemed Than if he had been poor, but shunned the man Who proudly glories in a sumptuous board, And treats a frugal competence with scorn; For he maintained that life's chief good consists not In the voracious glutton's full repast, But that a moderate portion will suffice. In his attachments still was he sincere, And zealous for the good of those he loved, Whether at hand or absent still the same; Small is the number of such friends as these; His manners were not counterfeit, his lips Distilled sweet courtesy, and left not aught That he had promised, either to the slave, Or citizen of Argos, unperformed. Eteoclus I next proceed to name, For every virtuous practice much renowned, Small were the fortunes of this noble youth, But in the Argive region he enjoyed Abundant honours: though his wealthier friends Oft sought to have presented him with gold, His doors were closed against that specious bane, Lest he might seem to act a servile part, By riches made a bondsman: he abhorred

The guilt of individuals, not the land Which nourished them: to cities no reproach Is due because their rulers are corrupt. Such also was Hippomedon, the third Of these illustrious chiefs; while yet a boy, To the delights the tuneful Muses yield, A life of abject softness, he disdained To turn aside: a tenant of the fields, His nature he to the severest toils Inuring, took delight in manly deeds, With fiery coursers issuing to the chase, Or twanged with nervous hands the sounding bow, And showed a generous eagerness to make His vigour useful to his native land. There lies the huntress Atalanta's son, Parthenopæus, by a beauteous form Distinguished: in Arcadia was he born, But, journeying thence to Inachus' stream, In Argos nurtured; having there received His education, first, as is the duty Of strangers in the country where they dwell, He never made a foe, nor to the state Became obnoxious, waged no strife of words (Whence citizens and foreigners offend), But, stationed in the van of battle, fought To guard the land as if he had been born An Argive, and whene'er the city prospered Rejoiced, but was with deepest anguish stung If a reverse of fortune it endured: Though many lovers, many blooming nymphs To him their hearts devoted, he maintained A blameless conduct. The great praises due To Tydeus I concisely will express; Though rude of speech, yet terrible in arms, Devising various stratagems, surpassed In prudence by his brother Meleager, By warlike arts he gained an equal name, Finding sweet music in the crash of shields: Nature endued him with the strongest thirst For glory and for riches; but his soul In actions, not in words, its force displayed. From this account, O Theseus, wonder not

Such generous youths before the Theban towers Feared not to meet an honourable death. For education is the source whence springs Ingenuous shame, and every man whose habits Have erst been virtuous, not without a blush, Becomes a dastard: courage may be taught; Just as a tender infant learns to speak And listen to the words he comprehends not; But he such wholesome lessons treasures up Till he is old. From this example train Your progeny in honour's arduous paths.

Chorus. I educated thee, my hapless son,

Thee in this womb sustained, and childbirth pangs
For thee endured; but now hath Pluto seized
The fruit of all my toils, and I, who bore
An offspring, am abandoned to distress,
Without a prop to stay my sinking age.

Adrastus. The gods themselves in louder strains extol Oicleus' illustrious son, whom yet alive
They with his rapid coursers snatched away
And bore into the caverns of the earth.

Theseus. Nor shall I utter falsehood while my tongue
Recounts the praise of Polynices, son
Of Œdipus; for as his guest the chief
Received me, ere, a voluntary exile,
Abandoning his native city reared
By Cadmus, to the Argive realm he went.
But know'st thou how I wish thou shouldst dispose
Of their remains?

Adrastus. All that I know is this,

Whatever you direct shall be obeyed.

Theseus. As for that Capaneus, who by the flame
Launched from Jove's hand was smitten—

Adrastus. Would you burn

His corse apart as sacred?

But all the rest on one funereal pyre.

Adrastus. Where mean you to erect his separate tomb?

Theseus. I near these hapless youths have fixed the spot
For his interment.

Adrastus. To your menial train
Must this unwelcome office be consigned.

Theseus. But to those other warriors will I pay

Due honours. Now advance, and hither bring
Their corses.

Adrastus. To your children, wretched matrons,
Draw near.

Theseus. Adrastus, sure thou hast proposed What cannot be expedient.

Adrastus. Why restrain

The mothers from their breathless sons' embrace?

Theseus. Should they behold their children thus deformed,
They would expire with grief. The face we loved,
Soon as pale death invades its bloom, becomes
A loathsome object. Why wouldst thou increase
Their sorrows?

Adrastus. You convince me. Ye must wait
With patience; for expedient are the counsels
Which Theseus gives. But when we have consumed

In blazing pyres their corses, ye their bones
Must take away. Why forge the brazen spear,
Unhappy mortals, why retaliate slaughter
With slaughter? O desist; no more engrossed
By fruitless labours, in your cities dwell,
Peaceful yourselves, and through the nations round
A general peace diffusing. For the term
Of human life is short, and should be passed
With every comfort, not in anxious toils.

Exeunt THESEUS and ADRASTUS.

CHORUS.

ODE.

Τ.

No more a mother's happy name Shall crown my fortunes or exalt my fame, 'Midst Argive matrons blest with generous heirs. Of all the parent's hopes bereft,

By Dian, patroness of childbirth left,
Ordained to lead a life of cares,
To wandering solitude consigned,

I like a cloud am driven before the howling wind.

II.

We, seven unhappy dames, deplore
The seven brave sons we erst exulting bore,
Illustrious champions who for Argos bled:
Forlorn and childless, drenched in tears,
Downward I hasten to the vale of years,
But am not numbered with the dead
Or living: a peculiar state
Is mine, on me attends an unexampled fate.

III.

For me nought now remains except to weep:
In my son's house are left behind
Some tokens; well I know those tresses shorn
Which no wreath shall ever bind,
No auspicious songs adorn,
And golden-haired Apollo scorn;
With horror from a broken sleep
Roused by grief at early morn
My crimson vest in gushing tears I steep.

But I the pyre of Capaneus behold
Already blazing, near his sacred tomb
Heaped high; and placed without the fane, those gifts
Which Theseus' self appropriates to the dead:
Evadne too, the consort of that chief,
Who by the thunderbolts of Jove was slain,
Daughter of noble Iphis, is at hand.
Why doth she stand upon the topmost ridge
Of yon aërial rock, which overlooks
This dome, as if she hither bent her way?

EVADNE, CHORUS.

ODE.

I.

Evadne. What cheering beams of radiant light Hyperion darted from his car,
And how did Cynthia's lamp shine bright,
While in the skies each glittering star

Rode swiftly through the drear abodes of night, When Argive youths a festive throng

T' accompany the nuptial song

For Capaneus and me awaked the lyre?
Now frantic hither am I borne

Resolved to share my lord's funereal pyre,
With him to enter the same tomb,
End with him this life forlorn,

In Pluto's realms, the Stygian gloom. If Heaven assent, the most delightful death

Is when with those we love we mix our parting breath. *Chorus*. Near to its mouth you stand and overlook

The blazing pyre, Jove's treasure, there is lodged Your husband whom his thunderbolts transpierced.

II.

Evadne.

Life's utmost goal I now behold, For I have finished my career: With steadfast purpose uncontrolled My steps doth fortune hither steer.

In the pursuit of honest fame grown bold,
Am I determined from this steep
Into the flames beneath to leap,

And mine with my dear husband's ashes blend;
I to the couch of Proserpine,

With him in death united, will descend.

Thee in the grave I'll ne'er betray:
Life and wedlock I resign

May some happier spousal day At Argos for Evadne's race remain,

And every wedded pair such constant loves maintain.

Chorus. But, lo, 'tis he! I view your aged sire,
The venerable Iphis, who approaches
As a fresh witness of those strange designs
Which yet he knows not, and will grieve to hear.

IPHIS, CHORUS, EVADNE.

Iphis. O most unhappy! Hither am I come, A miserable old man, with twofold griefs By Heaven afflicted; to his native land, The body of Eteoclus, my son, Slain by a Theban javelin, to convey,

And seek my daughter, with impetuous step Who rushed from her apartment; in the bond Of wedlock she to Capaneus was joined. And wishes to accompany in death Her husband; for a time she in my house Was guarded, but since I no longer watched her. 'Midst the confusion of our present ills She 'scaped; but we have reason to suspect That she is here; inform us, if ye know.

Evadne. Why do you question them? Here on this rock I, O my father, o'er the blazing pyre Of Capaneus stand, hovering like a bird.

Iphis. What gale hath borne thee hither? Or what means That robe, my daughter? Wherefore, from thy home Departing, to this region didst thou fly?

Evadne. 'Twould but exasperate you to be informed Of my intentions: therefore, O my sire, Am I unwilling you should hear.

What schemes Iphis. Are these which thy own father may not know?

Evadne. In you I should not find an equal judge Of my intentions.

Iphis. But on what account Thy person with that habit hast thou graced?

Evadne. A splendid action, O my sire, the robe I wear denotes.

Ill-suited is a garb So costly to the matron who bewails Her husband's death.

Iphis.

For an unheard-of purpose In gay habiliments am I attired.

Tphis. Why stand'st thou near the grave and blazing pyre? Evadne. Hither I come to gain a mighty conquest. Iphis. O'er whom wouldst thou prevail? I wish to know.

Evadne. O'er every woman whom the sun beholds.

Iphis. By Pallas in the labours of the loom Instructed, or with a judicious soul, That best of gifts endued?

With dauntless courage Evadne. For in the grave I with my breathless lord

Shall be united.

What is it thou say'st? Tohis.

Or with what views a riddle thus absurd Hast thou propounded?

Evadne. Hence into the pyre Of Capaneus will I leap down.

Iphis. My daughter,
Before the multitude forbear to hold

This language.

Evadne. There is nothing I have said
But what I wish that every Argive knew.

Iphis. Yet will I not consent thou should'st fulfil

Thy desperate purpose.

Evadne [as she is throwing herself from the Rock].

It is all the same:

Nor can you now by stretching forth your hand Stop my career. Already have I taken The fatal leap, and hence descend, with joy Though not indeed to you, yet to myself, And to my lord, with whose remains I blaze.

Chorus. Thou hast committed an atrocious deed,

Iphis. Wretched me! I am undone, Ye dames of Argos.

Chorus. Horrid are these ills
Which thou endur'st, the deed thine eyes behold
Is the most daring.

Iphis. No man can ye find Than me more miserable.

Chorus.

Of Œdipus' fortunes was reserved

For thee in thy old age; thou too, my city,

Art visited by the severest woes.

Iphis. Why was this privilege, alas! denied
To mortals, twice to flourish in the bloom
Of youth, and for a second time grow old?
For in our houses, we, if aught is found
To have been ill contrived, amend the fault
Which our maturer judgment hath descried;
While each important error in our life
Admits of no reform: but if with youth
And ripe old age we twice had been indulged,
Each devious step that marked our first career
We in our second might set right. For children,

Seeing that others had them, much I wished, And pined away with vehement desire; But if I had already felt these pangs, And from my own experience learnt how great Is the calamity to a fond father To be bereft of all his hopeful race. I into such distress had never fallen As now o'erwhelms me, who begot a youth Distinguished by his courage, and of him Am now deprived. No more. But what remains For me-wretch that I am? Shall I return To my own home, view many houses left Without inhabitants, and waste the dregs Of life in hopeless anguish, or repair To the abode of Capaneus, with joy By me frequented while my daughter lived? But she is now no more, who loved to kiss My furrowed cheeks and stroked this hoary head. Nought can delight us more than the attention Which to her aged sire a daughter pays: Though our male progeny have souls endued With courage far superior, yet less gently Do they these soothing offices perform. Will ye not quickly drag me to my home, And in some dungeon's gloomy hold confine, To wear away these aged limbs by famine? Me, what, alas! can it avail to touch My daughter's bones! What hatred do I bear To thee, O irresistible old age! Them, too, my soul abhors who vainly strive To lengthen out our little span of life; By th' easy vehicle, the downy couch, And by the boasted aid of magic song, Labouring to turn aside from his career Remorseless death: when they who have no longer The strength required to serve their native land Should vanish, and to younger men give place. Semichorus. Lo, there the bones of my slain sons, whose corses

> Already in funereal pyres have blazed, Are borne along. Support a weak old woman: The pangs which for my children's loss I feel

Deprive me of all strength. I long have mourned, And am enervated by many griefs. Can any curse severer be devised

For mortals than to see their children dead?

Boy. O my unhappy mother, from the flames
I bear my father's relics, which my sorrows
Have made more weighty: this small urn contains
All my possessions.

Semichorus. Why dost thou convey
The sad and pleasing cause of many tears

To the afflicted mothers of the slain, A little heap of ashes in the stead

Of those who in Mycenæ were renowned?

Boy. But I, a wretched orphan, and bereft
Of my unhappy father, shall receive
For my whole portion a deserted house,
Torn from the tutelary arms of him
To whom I owe my birth.

Semichorus. Where, where are those Whom sorrowing I brought forth, whom at my breast With a maternal tenderness I reared,

with a maternal tenderness I reared,

Their slumbers watched, and sweetest kisses gave?

Boy. Your children are departed, they exist

No longer, O my mother; they are gone
For ever, by devouring flames consumed;
In the mid-air they float, borne on light wind
To Pluto. O my sire, for sure thou hear'st
Thy children's lamentations, shall I bear
The shield hereafter to avenge thy death?

Iphis. May the time come, my son, when the just gods
To me shall for thy valiant father's death
A full atonement grant: that grievous loss
In this torn heart yet rankles unappeased.

Boy. I our hard fortunes have enough bewailed,
My sorrows are sufficient. I will take
My stand where chosen Grecian chiefs, arrayed
In brazen arms, with transport will receive me
Th' avenger of my sire. E'en now these eyes
Behold thee, O my father, on my cheeks
A kiss imprinting, though the winds have borne
Thy noble exhortations far away,
But thou hast left two mourners here behind,

Me and my mother: venerable man, No time can from thy wounded soul efface The grief thou for thy children feel'st.

Iphis. The load

Of anguish which I suffer is so great
That it hath quite o'ercome me. Hither bring,
And let me clasp those ashes to my breast.

Boy. These bitter lamentations have I heard
With streaming tears; they rend my inmost soul.

Iphis. Thou, O my son, art lost; and I no more Thy mother's dear, dear image shall behold.

THESEUS, ADRASTUS, IPHIS, CHORUS.

Theseus. Behold ye, O Adrastus, and ye dames
Of Argive race these children, in their hands
Bearing the relics of their valiant sires,
By me redeemed? Athens and I, these gifts
On you bestow: still are ye bound to cherish
A memory of those benefits, obtained
Through my mysterious spear. To all I speak
In the same terms. With honour due repay
This city, and the kindness which from us
Ye have experienced to your children's children
Transmit through latest ages. But let Jove
Bear witness, with what tokens of our bounty
Ye from this realm depart.

Adrastus. Full well we know

What favours you, O Theseus, have conferred Upon the Argive land, when most it needed A benefactor; hence will we retain Such gratitude as time shall ne'er efface. For we, the generous treatment which from you We have received, as largely should requite.

Theseus. Is there ought else I can bestow?

Adrastus. All hail;

For you and Athens every bliss deserve.

Theseus. May Heaven this wish accomplish! and mayst thou,
My friend, with equal happiness be crowned.

MINERVA, THESEUS, ADRASTUS, IPHIS, CHORUS.

Minerva. Attend, O Theseus, to Minerva's words,
And thou shalt learn what thou must do to serve

This country; give not to the boys these bones To bear to Argos, on such easy terms Dismissing them. But to requite the toils Of thee and of thy city, first exact A solemn oath, and let Adrastus swear, For he, its king, for the whole Argive realm Is qualified to answer, and be this The form prescribed: "Ne'er will Mycene's sons Into this land a hostile squadron lead, But hence, with their protended spears, repel Each fierce invader." If the sacred oath They impiously should violate, and march Against thy city, pray that utter ruin May light on Argos, and its perjured state. But where the gods require that thou shalt slay The victims, I will tell thee; in thy palace On brazen feet a massive tripod stands Which erst Alcides, when the walls of Troy He from their basis had o'erthrown, and rushed New labours to accomplish, gave command Close to the Pythian altar should be placed. When on this tripod thou hast slain three sheep, The destined victims, in its hollow rim Inscribe the oath; then to that god consign Who o'er the Delphic realm presides: such tablet To Greece shall testify the league ve form. But in the bowels of the earth conceal The knife with which the victims thou hast slain, For this, when shown, should they hereafter come, With arméd bands, this city to assail, Will strike Mycene's warriors with dismay, And their return embitter. When these rites Thou hast performed, the ashes of the dead Send from this region, and to them assign That grove in which their corses have by fire Been purified, the spot where meet three roads Sacred to th' Isthmian goddess. This to thee, O Theseus, have I spoken: to the boys Who spring from those slain Argive chiefs I add Ismenos' city, soon as ye attain Maturer years, shall ye in ruin lay, Retaliating the slaughter of your sires:

Thou too, Ægialeus, a youthful chief, Shalt in thy father's stead command the host, And marching from Ætolia's realm, the son Of Tydeus, Diomede by name; the down No sooner shall o'erspread your blooming cheeks Than with a band of Argive warriors clad In glittering armour, with impetuous rage, Ye the seven Theban turrets shall assail; Them, in your wrath, shall ye, in manhood's prime, Like whelps of lions visit, and lay waste The city. What have I foretold, ere long Will be accomplished. By applauding Greece Called the Epigoni, ye shall become A theme for your descendants' choral songs, Such squadrons ye to battle shall lead forth Favoured by righteous Jove.

Theseus.

Thy dread injunctions,

Minerva, awful queen, will I obey:
For I, while thou direct'st me, cannot err.
I from Adrastus will exact that oath,
Deign only thou to guide my steps aright,
For to our city if thou prov'st a friend
We shall enjoy blest safety.

Chorus.

Let us go,

Adrastus, and eternal friendship swear To Theseus and his city, for the toils They have endured our grateful reverence claim.

HERCULES DISTRACTED

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

AMPHITRYON. MEGARA. CHORUS OF THEBAN OLD MEN. HERCULES.

LYCUS. TRIS. A FIEND. MESSENGER.

Scene.—Before the Altar of Jupiter, at the Entrance of the House of Hercules in Thebes.

AMPHITRYON, MEGARA.

Amphitryon. Is there on earth, a stranger to the man Who shared the same auspicious nuptial bed With Jove, Amphitryon born at Argos, sprung From Perseus' son Alcæus, me the sire Of Hercules? He in these regions dwelt, Where from the soil a helmed crop arose; Mars, a small number of that race, preserved, Whose children's children people Cadmus' city. Hence Creon king of Thebes, Menæceus' son, Derives his birth, and Creon is the sire Of this unhappy Megara, to grace Whose hymeneal pomp, each Theban erst Attuned the jocund lute, into my house When Hercules conducted her. But leaving This realm where I resided, and his consort And kindred, my son chose to fix his seat Within the walls of Argos, of that city Erected by the Cyclops, whence I fled Stained with Electryon's gore: but to alleviate My woes, and in his native land obtain A quiet residence, this great reward He on Eurystheus promised to bestow, That he would rid the world of every pest: Harassed by Juno's stings, or envious fate, With her conspiring: but, his other labours Accomplished, he through Tænarus' jaws at length Went to the house of Pluto, to drag forth Into the realms of day hell's triple hound: He thence returns not. But an old tradition

Among the race of Cadmus hath prevailed. That Lycus, Dirce's husband, erst bore rule Over this city, till Jove's sons, Amphion And Zethus, who on milk-white coursers rode, Became its sovereigns. Lycus' son who bears His father's name, no Theban, but arriving From the Eubœan state, slew royal Creon. And having slain him, seized the throne, invading The city with tumultuous broils convulsed. But the affinity which we have formed With Creon, seems to be my greatest curse: For while my son stays in the realms beneath, Lycus th' egregious monarch of this land Would with the children of Alcides kill His consort, by fresh murders to extinguish The past, and kill me too (if one through age So useless may be numbered among men), Lest when the boys attain maturer age. They should avenge their grandsire Creon's death. But I (for my son left me here to tend His children, and direct the house, since he Entered the subterraneous realms of night), With their afflicted mother, lest the race Of Hercules should bleed, for an asylum Have chosen this altar of protecting Jove, Which my illustrious son for a memorial Of his victorious arms did here erect, When he in battle had subdued the Minyans. But we, though destitute of every comfort, Of food, drink, clothing, though constrained to lie On the bare pavement, here maintain our seat, For every hospitable door is barred Against us, and we have no other hope Of being saved. Some of our friends I see Are faithless, and the few who prove sincere, Too weak to aid us. Such is the effect Of adverse fortune o'er the race of men: May he to whom I bear the least attachment, Never experience that unerring test Of friendship.

Megara. Thou old man, who erst didst storm
The Taphian ramparts, when thou with renown

Didst lead the host of Thebes; the secret will
Of Heaven, how little can frail mortals know!
For to me too of no avail have proved
The fortunes of my father, who elate
With wealth and regal power (whence at the

breasts Of its possessors spears are hurled by those Whose souls the lust of mad ambition fires), And having children, gave me to thy son, Joining a noble consort in the bonds Of wedlock with Alcides, through whose death These blessings are all fled. Now I, and thou, Old man, are doomed to perish with the sons Of Hercules, whom, as the bird extends Her sheltering wings over her callow brood, I guard. By turns they come and question me: "O mother, whither is my father gone? What is he doing? when will he return?" Though now too young sufficiently to feel How great their loss, thus ask they for their sire. I change the theme, and forge a soothing tale, But am with wonder smitten when the doors Creak on their massive hinges, and at once They all start up, that at their father's knees They may fall prostrate. But what hope hast thou Of saving us, or what support, old man? For I to thee look up. We from the bounds Of these domains unnoticed cannot 'scape; Mightier than us, a watchful guard is placed At every avenue, and in our friends No longer for protection can we trust. Explain thyself, if thou hast any scheme, By which thou from impending death canst save us But let us strive to lengthen out the time, Since we are feeble.

Amphitryon. 'Tis no easy task

In such a situation, O my daughter,
To form a sure and instantaneous judgment.

Megara. What is there wanting to complete thy woes, Or why art thou so fond of life?

Amphitryon. That blessing

I still enjoy, still cherish pleasing hopes.

Megara. I also hope, old man: but it is folly
To look for what we never can attain.

Amphitryon. We by delaying might avert our fate.

Megara. But I in this sad interval of time

Feel piercing anguish.

Amphitryon. The auspicious gales Of fortune, O my daughter, yet may waft Both you and me out of our present troubles, If e'er my son your valiant lord return. But O be pacified yourself, and cause Your children to dry up their streaming tears; With gentle language and delusive tales Beguile them, though all fraudful arts are wretched. For the disasters which afflict mankind Are wearied out; the stormy winds retain not Their undiminished force; nor are the blest Perpetually blest: for all things change, And widely differ from their former state. The valiant man is he who still holds fast His hopes; but to despair bespeaks the coward.

CHORUS, AMPHITRYON, MEGARA.

Chorus. Propped on my faithful staff, from home. And from the couch of palsied age, In melancholy guise I roam, Constrained to chaunt funereal strains, As the expiring swan complains, A war of words alone I wage, In semblance, but a flitting sprite. An airy vision of the night. I totter; yet doth active zeal This faithful bosom still inspire. Ye children who have lost your sire, Thou veteran, and thou aged dame, Doomed for thy lord these griefs to feel, Whose Pluto's dreary mansions claim; O weary not your tender feet. Like steeds by galling harness bound, To turn the ponderous mill around, I would advance my friends to meet, Yet are my utmost efforts vain, This shattered frame I scarce sustain:

Draw near, O take this trembling hand, And holding fast my robe, support My steps, thy needful aid I court, Because I am too weak to stand. Lead on the chief, though now by years Bowed down, who marshalled on the strand, His comrades erst a hardy band; With him in youth we launched our spears, Nor then belied our native land. See how their eyes dart liquid fire, Those children emulate their sire; But still hereditary fate, Pursues with unrelenting hate Their tender years, nor can their charms Redeem them from impending harms. What valiant champions of thy cause, O Greece, thy violated laws, When these thy great supports shall fail, Torn from thy fostering land wilt thou bewail. But I behold the monarch of the realm, Tyrannic Lycus, who these doors approaches.

Lycus, Amphitryon, Megara, Chorus.

Lycus. This question (if I may) I to the sire And consort of Alcides would propose (But, as your king, I have a right to make Any inquiries I think fit): How long Seek ye to spin out life? What farther hope Have ye in view, what succour to ward off The stroke of death? Expect ye that the father Of these deserted children, who lies stretched Amid the realms beneath will thence return, That ye bely your rank, and meanly utter These clamorous plaints on being doomed to die? Through Greece hast thou diffused an idle boast. That Tove enjoyed thy consort, and begot An offspring like himself; while you exulted In being called wife to the first of heroes. But what great action hath your lord performed, In having slain that hydra at the lake, Or the Nemæan lion whom with snares He caught, and then did arrogantly boast

That he had strangled in his nervous arms? Will these exploits enable you to vie With me? and for such merit am I bound To spare the sons of Hercules, who gained

A name which he deserved not? He was brave In waging war with beasts, in nought beside, With his left hand he never did sustain The shield, nor faced he the protended spear, But with his bow, that weapon of a dastard, Was still prepared for flight: such arms afford No proof of courage; but the truly brave Is he who in the ranks where he is stationed Maintains his ground, and sees with steadfast eye Those ghastly wounds the missile javelin gives. Old man, I act not thus through cruelty, But caution; for I know that I have slain Creon her father, and possess his throne. These children therefore will not I allow To live till they attain maturer years, Lest they should punish me for such a deed. Amphitryon. Tove will assert the cause of his own son But as for me, O Hercules, my care Shall be to prove the folly of this tyrant: For thy illustrious name I will not suffer To be reproached. First from a hateful charge (And that of cowardice I deem most hateful), Calling the gods to witness, am I bound To vindicate thy honour. I appeal To Jove's own thunder, and th' impetuous steeds. Which drew Alcides' chariot when he sped Those winged arrows to transpierce the flanks Of earth-born giants, and among the gods Triumphant revelled at the genial board. Go next to Pholoe's realm, thou worst of kings, And ask the Centaurs' monstrous brood, what man They judge to be most brave, whether that title Belongs not to my son, who only bears, As you assert, the semblance of a hero? But should you question the Eubœan mount Of Dirphys, where your infancy was nurtured, It cannot sound your praise: you have performed No glorious action for your native land

To testify, yet scorn that wise invention The quiver fraught with shafts: attend to me And I will teach you wisdom. By his arms Encumbered, stands the warrior who is sheathed In ponderous mail, and through the fears of those Who fight in the same rank, if they want courage, Loses his life; nor, if his spear be broken, Furnished with nought but courage, from his breast Can he repel the wound; but he who bends With skilful hand the bow, hath this advantage, Which never fails him: with a thousand shafts He smites the foe, no danger to himself Incurring, but securely stands aloof, And wreaks his vengeance while they gaze around, Without perceiving whence the weapon comes: His person he exposes not, but takes A guarded post: for what in war displays The greatest prudence, is to vex the foe, Nor rush at random on their pointed spears. Such reasoning on the subject in debate With yours indeed agrees not: but what cause Have you for wishing to destroy these children? How have they injured you? In one respect I deem you wise, because you dread the race Of valiant men, and feel yourself a coward: Yet is it hard on us, if we must bleed Your apprehensions to remove; you ought To suffer all we would inflict, from us Whose merit is superior far to yours, Were Jove impartial. Would you therefore wield The sceptre of this land, let us depart As exiles from the realm, or you shall meet With strict retaliation, when the gales Of wavering fortune alter. O thou land Of Cadmus (for to thee I now will speak, But in reproachful accents), such protection Afford'st thou to the sons of Hercules, Who singly warring with the numerous host Of Minyæ, caused the Thebans to lift up Their free-born eyes undaunted? I on Greece No praises can bestow, nor will pass over In silence its base treatment of my son.

For 'twas its duty in these children's cause. Bearing flames, pointed spears, and glittering mail, To have marched forth, and recompensed the toils Of their great father, who had purged the sea And land from all its monsters. Such protection Nor doth the Theban city, O my children, Nor Greece afford you; but ye now look up To me a feeble friend who can do nought, But plead for you with unavailing words. For all the vigour which I once possessed Hath now deserted me; old age assails My trembling limbs and this decrepit frame. Were I again endued with youthful strength, I would snatch up my javelin, and defile With gore the yellow ringlets on the head Of that oppressor, whom his fear should drive Beyond the most remote Atlantic bounds.

Chorus. Are there not causes such as may provoke

Those who are virtuous to express their thoughts,

Though destitute of eloquence? Lycus.

'Gainst me Speak what thou wilt, for thou art armed with words, But for injurious language by my deeds Will I requite thee. Go, send woodmen, some To Helicon, some to Parnassus' vale, Bid them fell knotted oaks, and having borne them Into the city, heap their ponderous trunks Around the altar, and with kindled flames Consume the bodies of this hated race: So shall they learn that Creon the deceased No longer is the ruler of this land, But that I wield the sceptre. As for you Who thwart my counsels, O ye aged men, Not for the sons of Hercules alone Shall ye lament, but for those evil fortunes Which he and your own house are doomed to suffer: But this shall ye remember, that to me, Your monarch, ye are slaves.

Chorus.

O ye the race
Of earth, whom Mars erst sowed, when he had torn
From the huge dragon's jaws th' envenomed teeth,
With those right hands why will ye not uplift

The staves on which ye lean, and with his gore Defile the head of this unrighteous man, Not born at Thebes, but in a foreign realm, From inconsiderate youths who gains that homage Which he deserves not? but in evil hour O'er me shalt thou bear rule, nor shall my wealth Acquired by many toils be ever thine: Go, act the tyrant in Eubœa's land, From whence thou hither cam'st: for while I live, The sons of Hercules thou ne'er shall slay, Nor is their mighty father plunged so deep Beneath earth's surface, that he cannot hear His children's outcries. Thou to whom this land Owes its destruction dost possess the throne: But he its benefactor is deprived Of the rewards he merits. Me thou deem'st Officious, for protecting those I love E'en in the grave, where friends are needed most. O my right arm, how dost thou wish to wield The spear, but through enfeebling age hast lost Thy vigour: else would I have quelled thy pride Who dar'st to call me slave, and in this Thebes, Where thou exult'st, with glory dwelt. A city Diseased through mutiny and evil counsels Is void of wisdom, or would ne'er have chosen Thee for its lord.

Megara.

Ye veterans, I applaud Your zeal; for indignation at the wrongs His friends endure becomes the virtuous friend. But let not anger 'gainst your lord expose you To suffer in our cause. My judgment hear, Amphitryon, if to thee in aught I seem To speak discreetly. I these children love (And how can I help loving those I bore?) For whom I have endured the painful throes Of childbirth. And to die is what I think of As of a thing most dreadful; but the man Who with necessity contends I hold An idiot. But let us, since die we must, Not perish in the flames to furnish scope Of laughter to our foes, which I esteem An ill beyond e'en death: for much is due

To the unsullied honour of our house, For thee who erst in arms hast gained renown, To die with cowardice, were a reproach Not to be borne. My lord, though I forbear To dwell on his just praises, is so noble, He would not wish these children saved, to bear The imputation of an evil name: For through the conduct of degenerate sons Reproach oft falls on their illustrious sires; And the examples which my husband gave me, I ought not to reject. But view what grounds Thou hast for hope, that I of these may form A proper estimate. Dost thou expect Thy son to issue from the realms beneath? What chief deceased from Pluto's loathed abode Did e'er return? Can we by gentle words Appease this tyrant? No: we ought to fly From fools who are our foes: but to the wise And generous yield; for we with greater ease May make a friend of him in whom we find A sense of virtuous shame. But to my soul This thought occurs, that we, the children's sentence, By our entreaties, haply might obtain Converted into exile: yet this too Is wretched, at th' expense of piteous need To compass our deliverance. For their friends Avoid the face of guests like these, and look No longer kindly on the banished man After one day is over. Rouse thy courage, And bleed with us, thee too, since death awaits. By thy great soul, O veteran, I conjure thee. Although the man who labours to repel Evils inflicted by Heaven's wrath, is brave, Yet doth such courage border upon frenzy: For what the fates ordain, no god can frustrate.

Chorus. While yet these arms retained their youthful strength,
Had any one insulted thee, with ease
Could I have quelled him; but I now am nothing:
On thee, Amphitryon, therefore 'tis incumbent
To think how best thou may'st henceforth ward off
Th' assaults of fortune.

No unmanly fear,

Amphitryon.

No wish to lengthen out this life, prevents
My voluntary death: but I would save
The children of my son, though I appear
To grasp at things impossible. Behold
I bare my bosom to the sword; pierce, slay,
Or cast me from the rock. But I, O king,
For this one favour sue to you; despatch
Me and this hapless dame before the children,
Lest them we view, most execrable sight,
In death's convulsive pangs, to her who bore them,
And me their grandsire, shrieking out for aid.
But as for all beside, do what you list,
For we have now no bulwark which from death
Can save us.

Megara. I entreat one favour more,
Which to us both will equally be grateful.
Permit me in funereal robes to dress
My children; for that purpose be the gates
Thrown open (for the palace now is closed
Against us) that they from their father's house

This small advantage may obtain.

Lycus.

Your wishes
Shall be complied with. I my servants bid
Unbar the gates. Go in, bedeck yourselves;
The costly robes I grudge not; but no sooner
Shall ye have put them on, than I to you
Will come, and plunge you in the shades beneath.

[Exit Lycus

Megara. Follow your hapless mother, O my children,
To your paternal house, where, though our wealth
Be in the hands of others, our great name
We still preserve.

Amphitryon.

O Jove, 'twas then in vain
That thou didst deign to share my nuptial couch,
In vain too, of thy son have I been styled
The father, for thou hast not proved the friend
Thou didst appear to be. I, though a man,
Exceed in virtue thee a mighty god;
Because I to their foes have not betrayed
The sons of Hercules: but thou, by stealth,
Entering my chamber, to another's wife
Without permission cam'st; yet know'st not how

To save thy friends; thou surely art a god Either devoid of wisdom, or unjust.

Exeunt AMPHITRYON and MEGARA.

CHORUS.

ODE.

I. I.

For Linus' death, by all the tuneful Nine Bewailed, doth Phœbus' self complain, And loudly uttering his auspicious strain, Smite with a golden quill the lyre; but mine Shall be the task, while songs of praise I chaunt and twine the laureate wreath, His matchless fortitude t' emblaze,

Who sought hell's inmost gloom, the dreary shades beneath;

Whether I call the hero son of Jove,
Or of Amphitryon; for the fame
To which his labours have so just a claim,
Must e'en in death attract the public love:
In the Nemæan forest first he slew

That lion huge, whose tawny hide And grinning jaws extended wide, He o'er his shoulders threw.

I. 2.

The winged arrows whizzing from his bow,
Did on their native hills confound
The Centaurs' race with many a deadly wound:
Alcides' matchless strength doth Peneus know
Distinguished by his limpid waves,
The fields laid waste of wide extent,
With Pelion, and the neighbouring caves
Of Homoles, uprooting from whose steep ascent,
Tall pines that cast a venerable shade,
The monsters armed their forceful hands,
And strode terrific o'er Thessalia's lands:
Then breathless on th'ensanguined plain he laid
That hind distinguished by her golden horns,
And still in Dian's temple seen
His prize, to glad the huntress queen,

Oenöe's walls adorns.

II. I.

The chariot with triumphal ensigns graced
Ascending, to his stronger yoke
He Diomedes' furious coursers broke,
Scorning the bit, in hateful stalls who placed
By their fell lord, the flesh of man
Raging devoured, accursed food;

A stream from their foul mangers ran, Filled with unholy gore, and many a gobbet crude.

O'er Hebrus' silver tide at the command

Of Argos' unrelenting king
Eurystheus, he these captive steeds did bring,
Close to Anauros' mouth on Pelion's strand.
Inhuman Cycnus, son of Mars, next felt

The force of his resounding bow, Unsocial wretch, the stranger's foe, Who in Amphanea dwelt.

II. 2.

Then came he to th' harmonious nymphs, that band
Who in Hesperian gardens hold
Their station, where the vegetative gold
Glows in the fruitage; with resistless hand
To snatch the apple from its height;
The dragon wreathed his folds around
The tree's huge trunk, portentous sight,

In vain; that monster fell transfixed with many a wound.

Into those straits of the unfathomed main
He entered, with auspicious gales,
Where feared the mariner t' unfurl his sails,
And fixing limits to the watery plain
His columns reared: then from the heavens' huge
load

The wearied Atlas he relieved, His arm the starry realms upheaved, And propped the gods' abode.

III. I.

Foe to the Amazons' equestrian race He crossed the boisterous Euxine tide, And gave them battle by Mæotis' side.
What friends through Greece collected he to face
Hippolita, th' intrepid maid,
That he the belt of Mars might gain,

And tissued robe with golden braid. Still doth exulting Greece the virgin's spoils retain,

Lodged in Mycene's shrine, with gore imbrued,

The dog of Lerna's marshy plain,

Who unresisting multitudes had slain,
The hundred-headed hydra, he subdued,
Aided by fire, and winged shafts combined,

These from his well-stored quiver flew, And triple-formed Geryon slew, Fierce Erythræa's hind.

III. 2.

But having finished each adventurous strife,
At length in evil hour he steers
To Pluto's mansion, to the house of tears,
The goal of labour, there to end his life,
Thence never, never to return;
His friends dismayed forsake these gates,
In hopeless solitude we mourn.

Hell's stern award is passed, the boat of Charon waits To their eternal home his sons to bear,

Most impious lawless homicide!

For thee, O Hercules, thee erst his pride,
Thy sire now looks with impotent despair.
Had I the strength which I possessed of yore,

I with my Theban friends, arrayed
In brazen arms, thy sons would aid:
But youth's blest days are o'er.

Clad in funereal vestments I behold
The children of Alcides erst the great,
With his loved wife and his decrepit sire
Conducting them. O wretched me! no longer
Can I restrain the fountain of these tears
Which gush incessant from my aged eyes.

MEGARA, AMPHITRYON, CHORUS.

Megara. Come on. What priest, what butcher is at hand To slay these wretched children, or transpierce My bosom? Now the victims stand prepared
For their descent to Pluto's loathed abode.
By force, my children, are we borne along
United in th' unseemly bands of death;
Decrepit age with helpless infancy
And intermingled matrons. O dire fate
Of me and of my sons, whom these sad eyes
Shall never more behold! Alas! I bore,
I nurtured you, to be the scorn, the sport,
Of our inveterate foes, and by their hands
To perish. Each fond hope, which from the
words

Of your departed father erst I formed, Hath proved fallacious. The deceased to thee Allotted Argos, in Eurystheus' palace Wert thou to dwell a mighty king, and wield The sceptre of Pelasgia's fruitful land, Then with the lion's hide himself had worn Thy front he covered: you were to ascend The throne of Thebes for brazen chariots famed, Possessing my hereditary fields, Such were the hopes of your exulting sire, Who to your hand consigned that ponderous mace Deceitful gift of Dædalus: on thee, Thou little one, he promised to bestow Oecalia, which his shafts had erst laid waste: To you all three, these realms in threefold portions Did he distribute; for your father's views Were all magnanimous: but I marked out Selected consorts for you, and formed schemes Of new affinities, from the domains Of Athens, Sparta, and the Theban city; That binding up your cables, and secure From the tempestuous deep, ye might enjoy A happy life: these prospects now are vanished: For to your arms hath changeful Fortune given The Destinies to be your brides, while tears Are your unhappy mother's lustral drops. Your grandsire celebrates the nuptial feast, O'er which he summons Pluto to preside, The father of your consorts. But, alas! Whom first of you my children, or whom last

To this fond bosom shall I clasp, on whom Bestow a kiss, whom in my arms sustain? How like the bee with variegated wings Shall I collect the sorrows of you all, And blend the whole together in a flood Of tears exhaustless? O my dearest lord, If any of those spirits who reside In Pluto's realms beneath, can hear the voice Of mortals, in these words to thee I speak: O Hercules, thy father and thy sons Are doomed to bleed; I perish too who erst On thy account was by the world called happy. Protect us, come, and to these eyes appear, Though but a ghost; thy presence will suffice: For these thy children's murderers, when thee

Compared, are dastards.

Amphitryon. To appease the powers Of hell beneath, O woman, be thy care. But lifting to the skies my suppliant hands, I call on thee, O Jove, that, if thou mean To be a friend to these deserted children, Thou interpose without delay and save them, For soon 'twill be no longer in thy power: Thou oft hast been invoked; but all my prayers Are ineffectual; die, it seems, we must. But, O ve aged men, the bliss which life Can yield is small, contrive then how to pass As sweetly as is possible the hours Which fate allots you, e'en from morn till night Shaking off every grief: for Time preserves not Our hopes entire, but on his own pursuits Intent, deserts us, borne on rapid wings. Look but on me, amid the sons of men Conspicuous erst performing glorious deeds; And yet hath Fortune in one single day Taken all from me, like a feather wafted Into the trackless air. I know not him To whom collected stores of wealth or fame Are durable. Farewell, for this, my comrades, Is the last time ye shall behold your friend.

HERCULES, MEGARA, AMPHITRYON, CHORUS.

Megara. Ha! O thou aged man, do I behold

My dearest husband? How shall I find utterance?

Amphitryon. I know not, O my daughter; for I too Am with amazement seized.

This sure is he Megara. Who as we heard was in the realms beneath;

Else doth some vision in the noontide glare Delude our senses. But what frantic words Were those I spoke as if 'twas all a dream? This is no other than thy real son, Thou aged man. Come hither, O my children,

Cling to your father's robe, with speed advance, Quit not your hold, for ye in him shall find An equal to our great protector Tove.

Hercules. All hail, thou mansion, and thou vestibule Of my abode; thee with what joy once more Do I behold, revisiting the light. Ha! what hath happened? I my children see With garlands on their temples, and my wife Amidst a throng of men, my father too Weeping for some mischance. I'll go to them,

And ask the cause. What recent ill, O woman, Hath happened to this house?

Megara.

My dearest lord,

O thou who to thy aged father com'st A radiant light, in safety hast thou reached, At this important crisis, the abodes Of those thou lov'st.

What mean you by these words? Hercules. What tumults, O my sire, are we involved in?

Megara. We are undone; but O thou aged man,

Forgive, if I've anticipated that

Thou would'st have said to him: for in some points Our sex are greater objects of compassion

Than males. I deem my children dead: I too Am perishing.

Hercules.

O Phœbus! with what preludes

Do you begin your speech?

Megara. My valiant brothers, And aged sire, alas! are now no more.

Hercules. Who slew them, how, or with what weapon?

Megara.

Lycus,

The monarch of this city, was their murderer.

Hercules. With arms did he oppose them, or prevail,
When foul sedition through the land diffused
Its pestilent contagion?

Megara. By revolt

He holds the sceptre of the Theban realm.

Hercules. But wherefore hath this sudden panic reached You and my aged sire?

Megara. He would have slain

Thy father, me, and these defenceless children.

Hercules. What mean you? could he fear my orphan race?

Megara. Lest they hereafter might avenge the death Of Creon.

Hercules. But what garb is this they wear, Which suits some corse?

Megara. Already in these vestments

For our funereal rites are we arrayed.

Hercules. And were ye on the point of perishing

By violence? Ah me!

Megara. Our friends desert us;
For we have heard that thou wert dead.

Hercules. Whence rose

This comfortless depression of the soul?

Megara. Eurystheus' heralds the sad tidings bore.

Hercules. But for what cause did ye forsake my house, My sacred Lares?

Megara. From his bed thy sire

Was forciby dragged forth.

Hercules. So void of shame

Was Lycus as to treat his age with scorn?

Megara. Shame dwells not near the shrine of brutal force.

Hercules. Were we thus destitute of friends when absent? Megara. What friends abide with him who is unhappy?

Hercules. But did they scorn the battles which I fought Against the Minyans?

Megara. I to thee repeat it,
Calamity is friendless and forlorn.

Hercules. Will ye not cast from your dishevelled hair

These wreaths of Pluto? will ye not look up

To you bright your and one your even to view

To you bright sun, and ope your eyes to view

Scenes far more pleasing than the loathsome shades
Of hell beneath? But I, for wrongs like these
Demand my vengeful arm, with speed will go
And overturn the house of that new king,
His impious head I to the ravenous hounds
Lopped from his trunk will cast, and each base
Theban

Theban
Who with ingratitude repays my kindness
With this victorious weapon smite: my shafts
The rest shall scatter, till Ismenos' channel
Be choked up with the corses of the slain,
And Dirce's limpid fountain stream with gore.
For whom, in preference to my wife, my children,
And aged father, shall I aid? Farewell,
Ye labours which unwittingly I strove
T' accomplish, mindless of these dearest pledges;
In their defence I equally am bound
To yield up life, if for their father they
Were doomed to bleed. What! shall we call it
noble

To war against the hydra or the lion, And execute the mandates of Eurystheus, If I avert not my own children's death? No longer else shall I, as erst, be styled Alcides the victorious.

Chorus.

It is just

Parents should aid their sons, their aged sire, And the dear partner of the nuptial bed.

Amphitryon. My son, this mighty privilege is yours,
To be the best of friends to those you love,
And a determined foe to those you hate.
But be not too impetuous.

Hercules.

In what instance

Have I been hastier, O my honoured sire, Than it becomes me?

Amphitryon. To support his cause,
The king hath many, who in fact are poor,

Though fame accounts them rich; they raised a tumult,

And caused the ruin of the state, to plunder Their neighbours; for the fortunes they possessed Are through their own extravagance and sloth Reduced to nothing. As the gates you entered, These could not fail to see you: O beware Lest since you by your foes have been perceived, You perish when you least foresee your danger, Oppressed by numbers.

Hercules. Though all Thebes beheld me,
I care not. But when I descried a bird
Of evil omen perched aloof, I knew

That there had some calamity befallen
My house, and therefore with presaging soul

In secrecy I entered these domains.

Amphitryon. Draw near with pious awe, my son, salute The Lares, and display that welcome face In your paternal mansions. For to drag Your wife and children forth, with me your sire, To murder us, the king himself will come. But all will prosper, if you here remain, And a secure asylum will you find, Nor through the city spread a loud alarm

Ere your designs succeed.

Hercules. Thus will I act,

For thou hast rightly spoken; I am entering The palace. From the sunless caves beneath Of Proserpine, after a long delay Returning, first to our domestic gods

Will I be mindful to address my vows.

Amphitryon. Have you indeed then visited the house Of Pluto, O my son?

Hercules. And thence the dog
With triple-head brought to these realms of light.
Amphitryon. Conquered in battle, or on you bestowed

By hell's indulgent goddess?

Hercules. I prevailed
O'er him in combat, and have been so happy

As to behold the far-famed mystic orgies.

Amphitryon. But is the beast lodged in Eurystheus'

palace?

Hercules. Him Cthonia's groves and Hermion's walls confine.

Amphitryon. Knows not Eurystheus that you are returned

Into this upper world?

Hercules. He doth not know:
For I came first to learn what passes here.

Amphitryon. But wherefore in the realms beneath, so long Did you remain?

Hercules. I there prolonged my stay,
My sire, to bring back Theseus from the shades.

Amphitryon. And where is he, gone to his native land? Hercules. He went to Athens, pleased with his escape

From the infernal regions. But attend Your father to the palace, O my sons, Which now ye enter in a happier state Than when ye left it: but take courage, cease To pour forth floods of tears; and, O my wife, Collect thyself, let all thy terrors cease, And loose my garments; for I have not wings, Nor would I vanish from my friends. Alas! Their hold they quit not, but cling faster still, And faster to my vest. Because ye stand Upon the verge of ruin, I will take And bear you hence, as by the ship light boats Are guided o'er the deep: for I refuse not The care my children claim. Here all mankind Are on a level, they of nobler rank And mean condition, to their progeny Bear equal love. The gifts of fortune vary, Some have abundant wealth, and some are poor; But the whole human race feels this attachment. Exeunt HERCULES and MEGARA, with the children.

CHORUS.

ODE.

Į.

Youth is light, and free from care
But now a burden on my head
Heavier than Ætna's rock, old age, I bear,
Before these eyes its sable veil is spread.
Not for the wealth of Asiatic kings,
Or heaps of gold that touched you roof sublime,
Ere would I barter life's enchanting prime;
Hence would he brightered in Richard Street,

Hence wealth a brighter radiance flings, And poverty itself can charm: But thou, curst dotage, art the sum Of every fancied, every real harm;
May'st thou be plunged beneath the deep, nor come
To peopled town, or civilized abode,
Go wing thy distant flight along th' aerial road.

I. 2.

Did the gods with sapient care
Mete out their bounty to mankind,
The good, the gift of twofold youth should share
Unquestioned token of a virtuous mind,
Behold life's son its blest career renew,
While the degenerate sleep to wake no more.
We by these means distinctly might explore

Their merits with as clear a view,
As sailors, who each starry spark
Enumerate that adorns the skies.
But now the gods have by no certain mark
Directed whom we for their worth should prize,

Whom shun as wicked: uninformed we live, Revolving time hath nought but plenteous wealth to give.

II. I.

Mindful of its ancient themes,
This faltering tongue shall ne'er refuse,
Oft as I wander by their haunted streams,
To blend each gentle grace and tuneful muse:
O may I dwell among the harmonious choirs,
My brows still circled with a laureate wreath!
Still shall the bard, a hoary veteran, breathe

The strains Mnemosuné inspires: While memory wakes, I ne'er will cease Th' exploits of Hercules to sing;

Where Bromius yields the purple vine's increase, Where Libyan pipes and the lute's sevenfold string Are heard in dulcet unison; to praise The Nine who aid the dance, I'll wake my choral lays.

II. 2.

Delian virgins at the gate
Assembled, festive pæans sing,
The triumphs of Latona's son relate,
And nimbly vaulting form their beauteous ring.

Into thy temple, by devotion led, O Phœbus, will I raise my parting breath; The swan thus warbles at the hour of death: Though hoary hairs my cheeks o'erspread. How great the hero's generous love, Whose merits aid our votive song. Alcides the resistless son of Tove; Those trophies, which to noble birth belong By him are all surpassed, his forceful hand

Restoring peace, hath cleansed this monster-teeming land.

Lycus, Amphitryon, Chorus.

Lycus. Forth from the portals at due season comes Amphitryon; for 'tis long since ye were decked In robes and trappings such as suit the dead. But go, command the children and the wife Of Hercules without these gates t' appear, Because ye have engaged that ye will die By your own hands.

Amphitryon. You persecute, O king, Me whom already fortune hath made wretched, And with sharp taunts insult my dying race: Although in power supreme, you ought to act With moderation; but since you impose This harsh necessity, we must submit,

And execute your will.

Lycus. Where's Megara? Where are the children of Alcmena's son? Amphitryon. To me she seems, as far as I can guess,

From looking through the door-Lycus. What grounds hast thou

For this opinion?

In a suppliant posture Amphitryon. To sit before the Lares.

And implore them With unavailing plaints to save her life.

Amphitryon. In vain too calls she on her lord deceased. Lycus. But he is absent, he can ne'er return. Amphitryon. Unless some god should raise him up again.

Lycus. Go thou, and from the palace lead her hither.

Amphitryon. 'Twould make me an accomplice in the murder, If thus I acted.

Lycus. Since thy soul recoils, I, whom such idle scruples cannot move, Will with their mother bring the children forth. Follow my steps, my servants, that at length We may behold sweet peace succeed our toils.

Exit Lycus.

Amphitryon. Depart: for to that place the Fates ordain You now are on the road; perhaps the sequel Will be another's province: but expect, Since you have done amiss, to suffer vengeance. He, O ye veterans, at a lucky hour Enters the palace, for on ambushed swords His feet will stumble, while the villain hopes Those he would murder are too near at hand To 'scape: but I will go to see him fall A breathless corse: for when our foe endures The just requital of his impious deeds, There is a joy resulting from his death.

Exit AMPHITRYON.

Chorus. Changed are our evil fortunes. To the shades He who was erst a mighty king descends. O justice, and ye dread vicissitudes

Of fate, ordained by Heaven!

1st Semichor. Thou art at length Gone thither, where by death thou for those taunts, With which those o'er the virtuous didst exult, Shalt make atonement.

My delight bursts forth 2nd Semichor. In floods of tears: for now is come that day

The tyrant deemed would never visit him. 1st Semichor. But let us also look into the palace, My aged friend, and mark if yonder miscreant

Be punished as I wish.

Lycus [within]. Ah me! ah me! Chorus. That melody most grateful to mine ear

Beneath yon roofs commences; nor is death Far distant; for these cries the monarch utters Are but a prelude to the fatal stroke.

Lycus [within]. Ye realms of Cadmus, I through treachery perish!

and Semichor. Others have perished by that bloody hand. Since then the retribution thou endur'st

Is just, endure it bravely.

Where is he 1st Semichor. Who uttered 'gainst the blest immortal powers His foolish blasphemies, and called the gods Too weak to punish him?

and Semichor. That impious man Is now no more. You vaulted roofs are silent, Let us begin the harmonious choral lay; For, as I wished, our comrades prove victorious.

CHORUS.

ODE.

The sumptuous banquet, with th' enlivening dance Now every Theban shall employ; Dried are our tears, and past mischance Yields to the lyre abundant themes of joy: Stretched low in dust the tyrant lies; But he, who by an ancient right Obtains the sceptre, is our king; From Acheron's loathed stream behold him rise, Revisiting the cheerful realms of light, And hope, unlooked for, doth fresh transports bring

The gods take cognizance of broken trust. Nor are they deaf to holy prayer. On gold and fortune, power unjust Attends; man's reason is too weak to bear The joint temptations. Heaven at length, Whose kind protection we invoke. Deigning with pity to behold Our woes, to the neglected laws their strength Restoring, with vindictive fury broke The sable car which bore the god of gold.

Now let the flowery wreath, the victor's pride, Adorn Ismenos; let each street employ The hours in dance and social joy;

Let Dirce from the silver wave arise,
And old Asopus' daughters by her side,
Forsaking their paternal stream,
Conspire to aid our rapturous theme,
And for Alcides claim the victor's prize

And for Alcides claim the victor's prize. Ye Pythian rocks, with waving forests crowned, And seats of Helicon's melodious choir.

Come every nymph, with cheerful sound, Visit these walls which to the clouds aspire; In helmed crop here warriors filled the plains. Whose lineage undecayed from age to age remains.

II. 2.

O ye, the partners of one nuptial bed,
Happy Amphitryon, sprung from mortal race,
And Jove, who rushed to the embrace
Of bright Alcmena; for of thee aright,
Though erst, O Jove, I doubted, was it said
Thou didst enjoy that beauteous dame;
With the renown his triumphs claim,
Time through the world displays Alcides' might,
Emerged from grisly Pluto's realms abhorred,
Who quits the darksome caverns of the earth,

To me a far more welcome lord,
Than you vile tyrant of ignoble birth.
Now to the bloody strife we lift our eyes;
The vengeful sword is bared, if Justice haunt the skies.

Semichor. Ha! are we all by the same panic seized?

My aged friends, what spectre, hovering o'er

The palace, do I see? Those tardy feet
Raise from the ground, precipitate thy flight,
Begone.—From me, O Pæan, mighty king,
Avert these evils.

IRIS, A FIEND, CHORUS.

Iris.

O, ye aged men,
Be not dismayed: the fiend whom ye behold
Is daughter of old Night, and I am Iris,
The god's ambassadress. We are not come
To harm your city; for we only war
Against one man, who, sprung 'tis said from Jove

And from Alcmena: till he had performed Severest labours, fate preserved his life; Nor did his father Jove permit, or me, Or Juno, e'er to hurt him: but, each toil Eurystheus' hate enjoined, now he hath finished, Those oft-polluted hands with recent gore Will Juno stain, by urging him to slay His children: in this scheme I too conspire. Come on then, armed with a relentless heart, Unwedded daughter of the pitchy Night; Instil into that hero's breast such frenzy As shall o'erturn his reason, and constrain him To perpetrate this murder; his wild steps Goad onward, throw the bloody cable forth, That having sent this band of graceful sons, Slain by their father's arm, adown the gulf Of Acheron, th' effects of Juno's wrath And mine, he may experience; for the gods Would be mere things of no account, but great Would be the power of man, if he escaped Unpunished.

Fiend.

I from noble parents spring,
Night is my mother; and that blood which streamed
From the foul wound of Ouranus, my sire:
To me belongs this praise, I 'gainst my friend
No envious rancour feel, nor with delight
Invade them; but this counsel would suggest
To you and Juno, ere I see you rush
Into a fatal error, if my words
Can move you: he into whose house you send
me

Is not obscure, or in the realms beneath,
Or yet among the gods: for when o'er lands,
Impervious erst, and o'er the stormy waves,
He had established peace, he to the gods
Their ancient honours, which by impious men
Had been abolished, singly did restore.
I therefore would dissuade you from contriving
'Gainst him these mischiefs.

Iris.

Blame not thou the schemes

Devised by Juno and by me.

Fiend.

Your steps

Into a better path, from that which leads To evil, would I turn.

Iris. The wife of Jove

Sent thee not hither to act thus discreetly. Fiend. Witness, thou sun, reluctant I obey. But if constrained to be the instrument Of Juno's wrath and yours, I with such speed As when the hounds obey the huntsman's voice, Your signal will attend; nor shall the deep Upheaving with a groan its troubled waves, The earthquake, or the thunderbolt, whose blast Is winged with fate, outstrip me, when I rush Into the breast of Hercules: the gates Will I burst open, and assail the house, First causing his devoted sons to bleed; Nor shall their murderer know that his own hand Slew those whom he begot, till he is rescued From the distraction I inspire. Behold He at the barrier stands, and shakes his head, And rolls in silence his distorted eyes, Flaming with anger. To contain his breath No longer able, like a bull, prepared To make the terrible assault, he bellows, And calls the Furies from the dire abyss Of Tartarus. Thee I to a greater height Of frenzy soon will rouse, and through thy soul Cause my terrific clarion to resound. O noble Iris, to Olympus' height Now wing your swift career, while I, unseen, Will enter the abodes of Hercules.

[Exeunt IRIS and the FIEND.

Chorus. Thou city, groan; thy choicest flower,
The son of Jove, is cropped: O Greece,
Thy benefactor's fatal hour
Impends. To thee for ever lost,
Assailed by that infernal pest,
The dauntless chief, deprived of peace,
Shall feel his agonizing breast
With horrible distraction tossed.
Hence in her brazen chariot went
The raging fiend, on mischief bent;
She urges with a scorpion goad

Her steeds along th' ethereal road. That hundred-headed child of Night. With all those hissing snakes around, From her envenomed eyeballs bright The Gorgon thus directs the wound. Soon changed by Heaven's supreme decree, Is man's short-lived felicity. Ye infants, soon shall ye expire, Slain by your own distracted sire. Ah me! thy son, without delay, Shall be left childless, mighty Jove; For on his tortured soul shall prey Yon fiend, and by the powers above Vengeance commissioned to destroy. O mansion erst the scene of joy! To form a prelude to this dance, Neither the cheering timbrel's sound, Nor sportive Menades advance; Here human gore shall stream around, Instead of that refreshing juice, Which Bacchus' purple grapes produce. Away, ye children, danger's nigh, For he who wakes this hostile strain. Traces your footsteps as ye fly; Nor will the fiend with fruitless rage, A war beneath those mansions wage. Alas! we sink o'erwhelmed with woe, My tears shall never cease to flow. I wail the grandsire hoar with age, The mother too who bore that train Of lovely children, but in vain. Lo, what a tempest shakes the wall, And makes th' uprooted mansion fall! What mean'st thou, frantic son of Jove? The hellish uproar thou dost raise, Filling the palace with amaze, Is such as vexed the realms above, Till issuing with victorious might, Pallas invincible in fight The huge Enceladus oppressed, And piled all Ætna on his breast.

MESSENGER, CHORUS.

Messenger. O ye whose heads are whitened o'er with age! Chorus. Why dost thou call me with so loud a voice? Messenger. Atrocious are the mischiefs which have happened Within the palace.

Chorus. I need now call in

No other seer. The boys are slain. Ah me!

Messenger. Indulge your groans, for such events as these

Demand them.

Chorus. By a foe, e'en by the hand
Of their own sire, in whom that foe they found.

Messenger. No tongue can utter woes beyond what we
Have suffered.

Chorus. What account hast thou to give

Of the dire fate the father on his sons Inflicted? Sent by the avenging gods,

Say why such mischiefs visited this house, And how the children miserably fell. Messenger. To purify the house were victims brought Before Jove's altar, after Hercules Had slain and cast the monarch of this land Forth from these doors. Beside the victor stood His band of graceful children, with his sire And Megara. The sacred vase was borne Around the altar: from ill-omened words We all abstained. But while Alcmena's son In his right hand a kindled torch sustained, Ready to dip it in the lustral water, He made a silent stand; on this delay The children steadfastly observed their sire, But he no longer was the same; his eyes Were seized with strong convulsions, from their fibres Blood started forth, his bearded cheeks with foam Were covered: he midst bursts of laughter wild Cried: "Wherefore need I kindle, O my father, The fire for sacrifice, ere I have slain Eurystheus, in a double toil engaged, When I at once might better finish all? Soon as I hither bring Eurystheus' head, These hands which reek already with the gore Of Lycus, will I cleanse. Pour forth those waters

Upon the ground, and cast your urns away. Who brings my bow, my club? I to Mycene Will go: let spades and levers be prepared, That I from their foundations may o'erturn Those walls which with the plummet and the line The Cyclops reared." Then eager to depart, Although he had no chariot, yet he talked As if he had one, fancying that he mounted The seat, and with his hand as with a thong Drove the ideal steeds. His servants laughed, And at the same time trembled; till one cried (As on each other they with eager eyes Were gazing), "Doth my master sport with us, Or is he frantic?" Meanwhile through the palace Backward and forward he with hasty step Was walking: but no sooner did he reach That spacious hall, where at the genial board The men are wont t' assemble, than he said That he was come to Nisus' ancient city. And to th' imperial dome: and on the floor. As if reclining at the genial board, Bade us set forth the banquet. But the pause Which intervened was short, ere he exclaimed, That he was traversing the Isthmian rocks O'ergrown with woods; then casting off his mantle He strove though there was no antagonist With whom to strive, proclaimed himself the victor. The name of that imaginary foe Announcing, over whom he had prevailed: But 'gainst Eurystheus he anon did utter Menaces the most horrible, and talk As if he at Mycene had been present. His father strove to hold his vigorous arm, And said to him: "What mean you, O my son? What wanderings into distant realms are these? Hath not the blood of him you have just slain Distracted you?" Then for Eurystheus' sire Mistaking his own father, as he strove To touch his hand, repelled the trembling suppliant: Against his sons, the quiver and the bow, Thinking to slay the children of Eurystheus, He next made ready; they with terror smitten

Ran different ways; the first beneath the robes
Of his unhappy mother skulked; a second
Flew to the shade the lofty column formed:
Under the altar quivering like a bird,
The last concealed himself: their mother cried,
"What mean'st thou, O thou father, would'st thou
slay

Thy sons?" Amphitryon too, that aged man, And all the servants shrieked. But round the

pillar

The boy pursuing, he at length turned short, And meeting him, as foot to foot they stood, Transfixed his liver with a deadly shaft; Supine he fell, and with his streaming gore Distained the sculptured pillars, at whose base He breathed his last. But, with a shout, Alcides Uttered these boasts: "One of Eurystheus' brood Slain by this arm, for the inveterate hate His father bore me, to atone, here lies A breathless corse." Against another then. Who to the basis of the altar fled. And hoped to 'scape unseen, he bent his bow; But ere he gave the wound, the wretched youth Fell at his father's knees, stretched forth his hands To touch his chin, or twine around his neck, And cried: "O spare my life, my dearest sire, Yours, I am yours indeed; nor will you slay Eurystheus' son." But he with glaring eyes Looked like a Gorgon, while the boy pressed on So close, he had no scope to aim the shaft, But as the smith the glowing anvil smites, Full on his auburn tresses he discharged The ponderous mace, the crashing bones gave way. Scarce had he slain the second, when he ran To butcher his third son o'er both their corses: But the unhappy mother in her arms Caught up, into an inner chamber bore The child, and closed the doors: but he, as if He had indeed been at the Cyclops' city, With levers from their hinges forced them, pierced His wife and offspring with a single shaft, And then to slay his aged father rushed

With speed impetuous: but a spectre came, Which to our eyes the awful semblance bore Of Pallas brandishing her pointed spear, And threw a rocky fragment at the breast Of Hercules, which checked his murderous frenzy, And plunged him into sleep. Upon the ground Headlong he fell, where 'midst the ruins lay, Rent from its pedestal a broken column: But rallying from our flight, we, by his sire Assisted, to the pillar bound him fast With thongs, that on his wakening from this trance He might commit no more atrocious deeds. There doth he taste an inauspicious sleep, First having slain his children and his consort. I know no mortal more completely wretched. Exit MESSENGER.

Chorus. There was a murder in the Argive land

Most wondrous and unparalleled through Greece
In days of yore, which the confederate daughters
Of Danaus perpetrated; but their crimes
By the dire fate of Progne's only son
Were far surpassed. I of a bloody deed
Now speak which they committed, they whose
voice

Equals the Muses' choir; but thou who spring'st From Jove himself, hast in thy frenzy slain All thy three sons; for them what groans, what tears.

What invocations to the shades beneath,
Or songs shall I prepare to soothe the rage
Of grisly Pluto? Shivered on the ground
The portals of that lofty mansion view,
Behold the corses of the children stretcht
Before their miserable sire, whose senses,
Since he hath slain them, in profoundest sleep
Are buried. Mark those knotty cords around
The brawny limbs of Hercules, entwined
And to the columns in the palace fixed.
But old Amphitryon, like a bird who wails
Over its callow brood, with tardy step
Comes hither in the bitterness of grief.

AMPHITRYON, CHORUS.

The Palace gates thrown open, discover HERCULES stretched on the ground and sleeping.

Amphitryon. Ye aged Thebans, will ye not be silent,
Will ye not suffer him dissolved in sleep
His miseries to forget?

Chorus. These tears, these groans,
To you, O venerable man, I pay,
To those slain children, and the chief renowned
For his victorious conflicts.

Amphitryon. Farther still
Retire; forbear, forbear those clamorous sounds,
Lest his repose ye break, and from a trance
The sleeper rouse.

Chorus. How dreadful was this slaughter!

Amphitryon. Ha! ha! begone, for he in wild confusion

Is starting up. Why will ye not lament,

Ye aged men, in a more gentle tone?

Lest roused from sleep he burst his chains, destroy

The city, smite his sire, and with the ground

Lay these proud mansions level.

Chorus. This I hold

Impossible.

Amphitryon. Be silent, I will mark

Whether he breathe: O let me place my ear

Still closer.

Chorus. Sleeps he?

Amphitryon. An accursed repose,
Alas! he tastes, who hath his consort slain,
And slain his sons with that resounding bow.

Chorus. Now wail.

Amphitryon. I wail those children's fate.

Chorus. Your son,

Alas! old man, our equal pity claims.

Amphitryon. Observe strict silence, for again he rises
And turns around: I will conceal myself
Beneath that roof.

Chorus.

Be of good cheer: night seals

The eyelids of your son.

Amphitryon.

I am so wretched that without reluctance

I can bid life adieu: but if he kill Me too who am his father, guilt on guilt Shall he accumulate, and join the stings Of parricide to those which from the Furies Who haunt him, he already doth endure.

Chorus. Better you then had died, when you prepared T' avenge the slaughtered brothers of Alcmena, And stormed the fortress of the Taphian isle.

Amphitryon. Fly, leave the palace instantly; avoid
That frantic man, who from his sleep is roused,
For adding soon fresh slaughter to the past,
With Bacchanalian transport shall he range
Through Cadmus' city.

Chorus. Why hast thou, O Jove, Hated thy son so bitterly, and plunged him

Into this sea of troubles?

Hercules. [waking.] Ha! I breathe. And view each wonted object, air, and earth, And these bright solar beams. Into what storm, What dreadful perturbation of the soul Have I been plunged! all heated I transpire, Not from my lungs, but from my feverish heart. Behold me! wherefore am I bound with chains, Like a disabled ship towed into haven, And by this youthful chest and nervous arm Joined to a broken pillar? Here I sit Contiguous to the corses of the slain; My winged shafts lie scattered on the ground, With that unerring bow which erst I bore In war to guard me, and with care preserved. Sent by Eurystheus, am I then arrived A second time at the drear shades beneath? Neither the rock of Sisyphus, nor Pluto, Nor Ceres' sceptred daughter, do I see. I sure am stricken senseless with amazement, And know not where I am. But ho! what friend

Is near or at a distance, who will come
To give me information? For each object
Which I was erst acquainted with seems strange.

Amphitryon. Shall I approach this scene of my afflictions,
Ye aged men?

Chorus. I will attend your steps,

Nor meanly in calamity betray you.

Hercules. Why dost thou weep, my sire, and veil those eyes,

Retiring far from thy beloved son?

Amphitryon. My son-for though unhappy, you are mine.

Hercules. But what calamity do I endure

That causes thee to shed these tears?

Amphitryon. Your woes

Are such, that any god, if he endured The same, would groan.

Hercules. This hath a dreadful sound:

But you, my fortunes have not yet explained.

Amphitryon. Because if you your senses have recovered, Yourself behold them.

Hercules. Tell me what thou mean'st—

If to my charge thou lay'st some recent crime.

Amphitryon. If you no longer to the powers of hell

Are subjected, the truth will I unfold.

Hercules. Alas! how darkly thou again allud'st To what my soul suspects.

Amphitryon. Your looks I watch

To see if reason wholly be restored.

Hercules. I recollect not that I e'er was frantic.

Amphitryon. [to the CHORUS.]

Shall I unbind the shackles of my son,

Or how must we proceed?

Hercules. Say who was he

That bound me? for with scorn have I been treated.

Amphitryon. Thus much of your afflictions may you know:

Forbear all farther questions.

Is thy silence

Sufficient then to teach me what I wish

To learn?

Hercules.

Amphitryon. O Jove, dost thou behold the curses Hurled on thy son from envious Juno's throne?

Hercules. What dire effects of her inveterate rage

Have I endured?

Amphitryon. Of that vindictive goddess
No longer think: but to your own afflictions

Attend.

Hercules. Alas! I utterly am ruined!

What farther ill wouldst thou disclose?

See there Amphitryon.

The corses of your murdered children lie.

Hercules. Alas! what dreadful objects strike these eyes! Amphitryon. My son, against your progeny you waged An inauspicious war.

Why talk of war? Hercules.

Who slew them?

You, your arrows, and the cause Amphitryon. Of all these mischiefs, that remorseless goddess.

Hercules. What mean'st thou, or what crime have I committed.

My father, O thou messenger of ill?

Amphitryon. By frenzy urged. But you such questions ask, As I with grief must answer.

Have I murdered Hercules.

My consort also?

All these deeds of horror Amphitryon.

That single arm did perpetrate.

Alas! Hercules. A cloud of griefs surrounds me.

For this cause Amphitryon.

Your fortunes I lament.

Have I demolished Hercules. My own house too, with Bacchanalian rage Inspired?

The whole of what I know amounts Amphitryon. To this, that you are most completely wretched.

Hercules. Where did this fatal madness seize me first? Amphitryon. As round the altar, you, a flaming brand,

To expiate the foul murder which distains Your hands were bearing.

Hercules. Ah! why lengthen out

A guilty life, when of my dearest children I am become the murderer? Why delay To leap from the high rock, or with a sword Transpierce this bosom, on myself their blood Avenging? or t' avert that infamy Which waits me, shall I rush into the flames? But Theseus comes to bar these desperate counsels,

My kinsman and my friend; in a true light

To him shall I appear, and the pollution

I have incurred by slaying my own sons

Will be conspicuous to my dearest comrade. What shall I do? or where can I find out A solitude impervious to my woes? On rapid wings, O could I mount, or plunge Into the nether regions of the earth? Give me a veil to darken o'er my head. For 'tis with shame I think on the offence Caused by this deed: but to myself alone Ascribing the defilement of their blood, I wish not to contaminate the guiltless.

THESEUS, AMPHITRYON, HERCULES, CHORUS.

Theseus. An armed squadron of Athenian youths I hither bring, who near Asopus' stream Are stationed to assist your son in battle. For to the city of Erectheus' race A rumour came, that Lycus, having seized The sceptre of this land, is waging war 'Gainst you. O aged man, I to repay The benefits which Hercules conferred On me, whom from the dreary shades beneath In safety he redeemed, on your behalf Attend, if of this arm, or of my troops, Ye need the help. But, ha, what means the floor With weltering corses heaped? hath my design Proved ineffectual? am I then arrived Too late to remedy the dreadful mischiefs Which have already ta'en effect? who slew Those children, or whose consort was the dame Whom I behold? for where the boys are laid, No signs appear of any battle fought: But sure I of some other recent ill Now make discovery.

Amphitryon. O thou goddess, throned Upon that hill where verdant olives spring.

Theseus. Why speak you to me in this piteous tone,

And with such prelude?

Amphitryon. Grievous are the ills

Which we endure through Heaven's severe behest. Theseus. What boys are they o'er whose remains you weep? Amphitryon. Them did my miserable son beget, And when begotten slay, this impious murder He dared to perpetrate.

Express yourself Theseus.

In more auspicious terms.

I wish t' obev Amphitryon.

Th' injunctions thou hast given.

What dreadful words

Are these which you have uttered!

Amphitryon. In a moment

Were we undone.

What mean you, what hath happened? Amphitryon. This frenzy seized him sprinkled with the venom,

Which from the hundred-headed hydra flowed.

Theseus. Such Juno's wrath. But who, O aged man, Stands 'mong the dead?

My son, my valiant son. Amphitryon.

Inured to many toils, who in that war

Where earth's gigantic brood were slain, advanced Among the gods to the Phlegræan field

Armed with his buckler.

Theseus. Ah, what mighty chief Was e'er so wretched?

Amphitryon. Scarcely shalt thou know A man with greater labours vexed, and doomed

To wander through more regions.

But why veils he Theseus.

Beneath that robe his miserable head?

Amphitryon. Because thy presence, friendship's sacred ties Added to those of kindred, and the gore

Of his slain children, fill his soul with shame.

Theseus. I with his griefs am come to sympathise; Uncover him.

Amphitryon. That garment from your eyes

Remove, display your visage to the sun. It ill becomes my dignity to weep:

Yet I a suppliant strive to touch your beard,

Your knees, your hand, and shed these hoary tears.

O curb your soul, my son, whose fierceness equals That of the lion, else 'twill hurry you

To bloody impious rage, and make you add Mischiefs to mischiefs.

Theseus.

Ho! on thee I call,

On thee, who to that seat of misery seem'st
Fast riveted; permit thy friends to see
Thy face: for darkness hath no cloud so black
As to conceal thy woes. Why dost thou wave
Thy hand and point to those whom thou hast slain,
Lest by this converse I pollute myself?
I am not loth to share thy woes; I erst
Was happy (which my soul is ever bound
To recollect with gratitude) when thou
From hell's loathed gloom, the mansion of the
dead.

Didst safely bear me to the realms of light. For I abhor th' attachment of those friends Which time impairs, him too who would enjoy Their better fortunes, but refuse to sail In the same bark with those who prove unblest. Rise up, unveil thy miserable head And look on me. A noble mind sustains Without reluctance what the gods inflict.

Hercules. Did you, O Theseus, see me slay my children? Theseus. I heard, and now behold the ills thou speak'st of.

Hercules. Then why did'st thou uncover to the sun My guilty head?

Theseus. Why not? canst thou, a man, Pollute the gods?

Hercules. Avaunt, O wretch, avaunt, For I am all contagion.

Theseus. To a friend

No mischief from his friend can be transmitted.

Hercules. Your conduct I applaud, nor will deny
That I have served you.

Theseus. I who erst received Those favours at thy hands, now pity thee.

Hercules. I am indeed an object of your pity, From having slain my sons.

Theseus. For thee I weep,
Because to me thou heretofore wert kind
When vexed by other ills.

Hercules. Did you e'er meet
With those who were more wretched?

Theseus. Thy afflictions

Are of such giant bulk, that they to heaven Reach from this nether world.

Hercules. Hence am I ready

For instant death.

Theseus. Canst thou suppose the gods

Regard thy threats?

Hercules. Self-willed are they and cruel, And I defy the gods.

Theseus. Restrain thy tongue,

Lest thou by uttering such presumptuous words Increase thy sufferings.

Hercules. I with woes am fraught

Already, nor remains there space for more.

Theseus. But what design'st thou? whither art thou borne With frantic rage?

Hercules. In death will I return

To those abodes beneath, whence late I came.

Theseus. Thou speak'st the language of a vulgar man.

Hercules. Exempt from all calamity yourself, On me these admonitions you bestow.

Theseus. Are these fit words for Hercules to use,
Who many toils endured?

Hercules.

I had not suffered
Thus much, if any bounds had circumscribed
My labours.

Theseus. Benefactor of mankind,

And their great friend?

Hercules

From them no aid I find;

But Juno triumphs.

Theseus. Greece will not permit thee
To perish unregarded.

Hear me now,

That I with reason your advice may combat;
To you will I explain both why it is
And long hath been impossible for me
To live; and first, because from him, I spring,
Who, having slain the father of Alcmena,
Defiled with murder, wedded her who bore me.
When thus the basis of a family
Is laid in guilt, the children must be wretched.
But Jove (or some one who assumed the name
Of Jove) begot me; hence to Juno's hate

Was I obnoxious. Yet, O let not this Offend thine ear, old man, for thee, not Jove, I deem my real sire. While yet I hung An infant at the breast, Jove's wife by stealth Sent snakes into my cradle to destroy me. But after I attained the bloom of manhood. Of what avail were it, should I recount The various labours I endured, what lions. What typhons with a triple form, what giants, Or what four-footed centaurs, who in crowds Rushed to the battle, by this arm were slain? How I despatched the hydra too, that monster With heads surrounded, branching out anew, And having suffered many toils beside, Went to the mansions of the dead, to bring Hell's triple-headed dog into the realms Of light, for thus Eurystheus had enjoined? But I at last, wretch that I am, this murder Did perpetrate, and my own children slay, That to their utmost summit I might raise The miseries of this house. My fate is such That in my native Thebes I must not dwell: But if I here continue, to what temple Or friends can I repair? for by such curses I now am visited, that none will dare To speak to me. To Argos shall I go? How can I, when my country drives me forth? To any other city should I fly, The consequence were this: with looks askance I should be viewed as one well known, and harassed With these reproaches by malignant tongues: "Is not this he, the son of Jove, who murdered His children and his consort? from this land Shall not th' accursed miscreant be expelled?" To him who was called happy once, such change Is bitterness indeed: as for the man Whose sufferings are perpetual, him, when wretched. No kinsman pities. I to such a pitch Of woe shall come, I deem, at length, that earth, Uttering a voice indignant, will forbid me To touch its surface, ocean, o'er its waves, And every river, o'er its streams, to pass.

I shall be like Ixion then, with chains Fixed to the wheel. 'Twere better that no Greek With whom I in my happier days conversed Should see me more. What motive can I have For living? or to me of what avail Were it to keep possession of this useless And this unholy being? flushed with joy, Let Jove's illustrious consort, in the dance, Strike with her sandals the resplendent floor Of high Olympus: for she now hath gained Her utmost wish, and from his basis torn The first of Grecian warriors. Who can pray To such a goddess, who, with envy stung, Because Jove loved a woman, hath destroyed The benefactors of the Grecian realm, Those blameless objects of her hate?

Theseus.

This mischief

Springs from no god except the wife of Jove. Well dost thou judge, in saying that 'tis easier To give the wholesome counsel, than endure Such agonies. But no man 'scapes unwounded By fortune, and no god; unless the songs Of ancient bards mislead. Have not the gods Among themselves formed lawless marriages? Have they not bound in ignominious chains Their fathers, to obtain a throne? In heaven Yet dwell they, and bear up beneath the load Of all their crimes. But what canst thou allege, If thou, frail mortal as thou art, those ills Immoderately bewail'st to which the gods Without reluctance yield? from Thebes retire. Since thus the laws ordain; and follow me To Pallas' city: when thy hands are there Cleansed from pollution, I to thee will give A palace, and with thee divide my wealth. The presents which the citizens to me Appropriated, when twice seven blooming victims I by the slaughter of the Cretan bull Redeemed, on thee will I bestow. For portions Of land are through the realm to me assigned: These, while thou liv'st henceforth shall by thy name Be called: but after death, when to the shades

Of Pluto thou descend'st, with sacrifice And with the sculptured tomb, shall Athens grace Thy memory. For her citizens have gained This fairest wreath from every Grecian state, By yielding succour to the virtuous man Their glories are augmented: and to thee Will I repay with gratitude the kindness Which thou deserv'st for saving me; for thou Hast need of friends at present: but no friend Is wanted when the gods confer renown; For, if he wills, Jove's aid is all-sufficient. Hercules. You hold a language foreign to my griefs. But I suppose not that the gods delight In lawless nuptials, that their hands are bound With galling chains, nor did I e'er believe, Nor can I be convinced, that one bears rule Over another. For a deity If he be truly such, can stand in need Of no support. But by some lying bard Those miserable fables were devised. Although I am most wretched, yet I thought I might be charged with cowardice for leaving These realms of light. For he who bears not up 'Gainst adverse fortune, never can withstand The weapon of his foe. I am resolved To wait for death with firmness: to your city Meantime will I retreat, and am most grateful For your unnumbered gifts. Unnumbered labours Have I been erst acquainted with; from none Did I e'er shrink, these eyes did never stream With tears, nor thought I that I e'er should come To such a pitch of meanness as to weep: But now, it seems, must Fortune be obeyed. I am content. Thou, O my aged sire, Behold'st my exile, thou in me behold'st The murderer of my children: to the tomb Consign their corses with funereal pomp, And o'er them shed the tributary tear: For me the laws allow not to perform

> This office. Let their mother, e'en in death, Clasp to her breast, and in her arms sustain, Our wretched offspring, whom in evil hour

I slew reluctant. But when thou with earth Hast covered them, thy residence still keep Here in this city, miserably indeed, Yet on thy soul lay this constraint, to bear With me the woes which I most deeply feel. The very sire, ve children, who begot, Murdered you; no advantage ye derive From what this arm by all my labours gained, And from your father's triumphs no renown. Have not I slain thee too who didst preserve My bed inviolate, and o'er my house Long watch with patient care? Ah me! my wife, My sons: but how much more to be lamented Am I myself, from them for ever torn? Ye melancholy joys of kisses lavished On their remains, and ye my loathed companions, The weapons which I still retain, but doubt Whether to keep or dash them to the ground; For they, while at my side they hang, will seem To utter these reproachful words: "With us Thy consort and thy children hast thou slain, Yet thou the very instruments preserv'st Which were their murderers." After such a charge Can I still bear them? what can I allege? But stripping off those arms with which through Greece

I have achieved full many glorious deeds, Shall I expose myself to those who hate me, And die ignobly? I must not abandon But keep them still, though sorrowing. Aid me,

Theseus, In this one enterprise; to Argos go

And for your friend obtain the great reward
Promised for dragging from the shades of hell
That execrable hound: lest if by you
Deserted, I through grief for my slain children
Should come to some calamitous end. Thou
realm

Of Cadmus, and ye citizens of Thebes, With tresses shorn, in concert weep; the tomb Of my slain children visit, there bewail, In one funereal dirge, the dead, and me; For smitten with the same dire scourge of fate By Juno, we all perish.

Theseus. Hapless man.

Arise; enough of tears.

Hercules. I cannot rise. These limbs are now grown stiff.

Calamity

Subdues the valiant.

Would I were a stone, Hercules.

Insensible to sufferings!

Cease these plaints; And to the friend who comes to serve thee, give Thy hand.

But let me not wipe off the blood Hercules. Upon your garments. Wipe it off, nor scruple,

For I object not.

Of my sons bereft, Hercules. In you the likeness of a son I find.

Theseus. Fling round my neck thine arm: I'll lead the way.

Hercules. A pair of friends: though one of us be wretched. Such, O my aged father, is the man We ought to make a friend.

His native realm Theseus. Produces an illustrious progeny.

Hercules. Turn me around, that I may see my sons. Theseus. Hoping such philtre may thy griefs appease.

Hercules. This earnestly I wish for, and would clasp My father to this bosom.

Here, lo, here! Amphitryon.

For what my son desires, to me is grateful. Theseus. Of all the labours thou didst erst achieve,

Hast thou thus lost the memory?

All those ills Hercules. Were less severe than what I now experience.

Theseus. Should any one behold thee grown unmanly, He could not praise thee.

Though to you I seem Hercules. Degraded to an abject life, I trust

That I my former courage shall resume.

Theseus. Where now is the illustrious Hercules?

Hercules. What had you been, if still you in the shades Had miserably dwelt?

Then sunk my courage Theseus.

Beneath the meanest of the human race. Hercules. Why then persist in saying that my woes

Have quite subdued me?

Onward! Theseus.

Good old man, Hercules.

My children

Farewell.

Farewell too, O my son.

Amphitryon. Hercules.

Inter as I directed.

Amphitryon. O, my son,

But who will bury me?

Hercules. I.

When will you Amphitryon.

Come hither?

After thou hast for my children Hercules. Performed that pious office.

Amphitryon. How?

I'll fetch thee Hercules.

From Thebes to Athens.—Bear into the palace My children's corses which pollute the ground. But as for me, who have disgraced and plunged My house in ruin, I will follow Theseus, Towed like a battered skiff. Whoe'er prefers Wealth or dominion to a steadfast friend. Judges amiss.

Chorus. Most wretched, drowned in tears, Reft of our great protector, we depart.

THE CHILDREN OF HERCULES

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

IOLAUS.
COPREUS.
CHORUS OF ATHENIAN
OLD MEN.

DEMOPHOON.
MACARIA.
ALCMENA.
MESSENGER.

EURYSTHEUS.

Scene. —Before the Altar of Jupiter, in the Forum at Marathon, a City in the Athenian Dominions.

TOLAUS.

Long have I held this sentiment: the just Are born the streams of bounty to diffuse On all around them; while the man whose soul Is warped by interest, useless in the State. Untractable and harsh to every friend, Lives only for himself; in words alone This doctrine I imbibed not. Through a sense Of virtuous shame and reverence for my kindred When I in peace at Argos might have dwelt, I singly shared the toils of Hercules, While he on earth remained; but now he dwells In heaven, I guard his children, though protection Be what I need myself. For when their sire Forsook this nether world, Eurystheus strove Immediately to slay us; but I 'scaped From that oppressor's fangs, and though to me Lost is my country, I have saved my life. But we poor vagabonds, from city fly To some fresh city, ever forced to change Our dwelling; for Eurystheus deems it meet To add this wrong to former wrongs, he sends His heralds wheresoe'er he hears we settle, And claims and drives us forth from every land; No slight resentment from the Argive realm Against our friends denouncing, he reminds them Of his own prosperous fortunes; when they see My weakness, and these little ones bereft Of their great father, to superior might They crouch, and force the suppliant to depart.

But with the exiled race of Hercules A voluntary exile, I partake Their evil fortunes, steadfastly resolved Not to betray them; by malignant tongues It never shall be said, "Oh, mark these orphans! Since their sire's death their kinsman Iolaus Protects them not." But, exiled from all Greece, On reaching Marathon and the domain Subject to the same rulers, here we sit Before the altars of the gods, and sue For their assistance. In this region dwell Two sons of Theseus, I am told, by lot Who portion out this realm, they from Pandion Descend, and to these children are allied. We therefore undertook our present journey To the Athenian realm; two aged guides Conduct the hapless wanderers; my attention Is to the boys devoted; but Alcmena, Entering the adjacent temple, in her arms Tenderly clasps the female progeny Of her departed son. Amid the crowd We fear to introduce these tender virgins, Or place them at the altars of the gods. But Hyllus and his brothers, more mature In years, inquire in what far distant land A fortress for our future residence We yet can find, if we from these domains By force should be expelled. My sons, come hither, Cling to this garment; for to us I see Eurystheus' herald coming, by whose hate, We wanderers, banished from each friendly realm. Are still pursued. Thou, execrable miscreant, Perish thyself, and perish he who sent thee: For to the noble father of these children Oft hath that tongue enjoined severest toils.

COPREUS IOLAUS.

Copreus. What, think'st thou unmo.ested to enjoy
This pleasant seat, and have thy vagrant steps
Entered at length a city prompt to fight
Thy battles? for the man who will prefer
Thy feeble arm to that of great Eurystheus,

Exists not. Hence! why in these useless toils Dost thou persist? thou must return to Argos Where they have doomed thee to be stoned.

Iolaus. Not thus:

For in this altar shall I find protection, And this free country on whose soil we tread.

Copreus. Wilt thou constrain me then to have recourse To violence?

Iolaus. With forceful hand, nor me
Nor these poor children shalt thou hence expel.

Copreus. Ere long shalt thou perceive that thou hast uttered Erroneous prophecies.

Iolaus. This ne'er shall be

Long as I live.

Copreus. Depart, for I will seize them 'Gainst thy consent, and to Eurystheus' power Surrender up, for they to him belong.

Iolaus. Aid me, ye ancient citizens of Athens,
For we, though suppliants, forcibly are torn
E'en from Jove's public altar, and the wreaths
Twined round our sacred branches are polluted;
Shame to your city, insult to the gods.

CHORUS, IOLAUS, COPREUS.

Chorus. What clamorous voices from you altars rise?
What mischiefs are impending?

aus. See a man
Burdened with age, wretch that I am! lie prostrate.

Chorus. Who threw thee down? what execrable hand—

Iolaus. 'Tis he, O stranger, he who to your gods

Yielding no reverence, strives with impious force E'en now, to drag me from this hallowed seat Before Jove's altar.

Chorus. He! But from what land
Cam'st thou, old man, to this confederate state
Formed of four cities? From the distant coast
Of steep Eubœa did ye ply your oars?

Iolaus. The life I lead, O stranger, is not that Of vagrant islanders; but in your realm From famed Mycene's bulwarks I arrive.

Chorus. Among thy countrymen, old man, what name Thou bearest, inform me.

Iolaus. Ye perchance knew somewhat

Of Iolaus, great Alcides' comrade,

A name not quite unnoticed by renown.

Chorus. I formerly have heard of him: but say
Who is the father of that infant race,
Whom with thy arm thou guid'st?

Iolaus. These are the sons

Of Hercules, O strangers, they, to you, And to your city, humble suppliants come.

Chorus. On what account, inform me; to demand
An audience of the state?

Iolaus. They may not be surrendered up now term

They may not be surrendered up, nor torn Forcibly from the altars of your gods, And carried back to Argos.

Copreus. But thy lords
Who bear rule over thee, and hither trace
Thy steps, will ne'er be satisfied with this.

Chorus. O stranger, 'tis our duty to revere

The suppliants of the gods: with forceful hand Shall no man drag thee from this holy spot,
This seat of the immortal powers; dread justice Shall guard thee from the wrong.

Copreus. Out of your land
The vagrant subjects of Eurystheus drive,

As I admonish: and this hand shall use No violence.

Chorus. How impious is that city

Which disregards the helpless stranger's prayer! Copreus. 'Twere best to interfere not in these broils,

And to adopt some more expedient counsels.

Chorus. You, therefore, to the monarch of this realm
Should have declared your errand, ere thus

You had proceeded: but with brutal force These strangers from the altars of the gods Presume not to convey, and to this land Of freedom yield due reverence.

Copreus. But what king Rules this domain and city?

Chorus. Theseus' son,

Renowned Demophoon.

Copreus. Better I with him

This contest could decide: for all I yet Have spoken, is but a mere waste of words.

Chorus. Behold, he hither comes in haste, and with him,
To hear this cause, his brother Acamas.

DEMOPHOON, IOLAUS, COPREUS, CHORUS.

Demophoon. Since by thy speed, old man, thou hast outstripped

> Thy juniors, and already reached the shrine Of Jove, inform me what event hath caused

This multitude t' assemble.

Chorus. There the sons

Of Hercules in suppliant posture sit, And with their wreaths, as you behold, O king,

Adorn the altar; that is Iolaus, The faithful comrade of their valiant sire.

Demophoon. How needed their distress these clamorous shrieks?

Chorus. [turning towards COPREUS.]

He raised the uproar, when by force he strove To bear them hence, and on his knees, to earth Threw the old man, till I for pity wept.

Demophoon. Although he in the habit which he wears
Adopts the mode of Greece, such deeds as these
Speak the barbarian. But without delay
On thee it is incumbent now to tell me
The country whence thou cam'st.

Copreus. I am an Argive;

Thus far to solve your question: but from whence I come, and on what errand, will I add; Mycene's king, Eurystheus, sends me hither To fetch these vagrants home: yet I, O stranger, Will with abundant justice, in my actions, As well as words, proceed; myself an Argive, I bear away these Argives, I but seize The fugitives who from my native land Escaped, when by the laws which there prevail They were ordained to bleed. We have a right, Because we are the rulers of the city, To execute the sentence we enact 'Gainst our own subjects. To the sacred hearths

Of many other states when they repaired, We urged the self-same reasons, and none ventured To be the authors of their own destruction. But haply they in you may have perceived A foolish tenderness, and hither come, Desperate themselves, you also to involve In the same perils, whether they succeed Or fail in the emprise: for they no hope Can cherish, while you yet retain your reason, That you alone, in all the wide extent Of Greece, whose various regions they have traversed, Should pity those calamities which rise But from their own imprudence. Now compare Th' alternative proposed; by sheltering them In these dominions, or allowing us To bear them hence, what gain may you expect? Side but with us, these benefits are yours: Eurystheus' self, and Argos' numerous troops, Will aid this city with their utmost might; But if, by their seducing language moved, Ye harbour groundless pity for their woes, Arms must decide the strife. Nor vainly think We will desist till we have fully tried The temper of our swords. But what excuse Have ye to plead? Of what domains bereft Are ye provoked to wage a desperate war With the Tirynthian Argives? What allies Will aid you? What pretext can ye allege To claim funereal honours for the slain? The curses of your city will await Such conduct; for the sake of that old man, Whom I may justly call a tomb, a shadow, And those unfriended children, should you step Into the vawning gulf. Suppose the best Which possibly can happen, that a prospect Of future good hence rises; distant hopes Fall short of present gain. In riper years Ill can these youths be qualified to fight Against the Argive host (if this elate Your soul with hope), and ere that wished event There is a length of intermediate time In which ye may be ruined; but comply

With my advice; on me no gift bestow, Let me but take what to ourselves belongs, Mycene shall be yours. But oh, forbear To act as ye are wont, nor form a league With those of no account, when mightier friends May be procured.

Demophoon. Who can decide a cause
Or ascertain its merits till he hear
Both sides distinctly.

In your land, O king,

This great advantage, freedom of reply To the malignant charge against me urged, I find, and no man, as from other cities, Shall drive me hence. But we have nothing left For which it now behoves us to contend With him, nor aught, since that decree hath passed. To do with Argos; from our native land We are cast forth. In this distressful state, How can he drag us back again with justice As subjects of Mycene, to that realm Which hath already banished us? We there Are only foreigners. But why should he Whom Argos dooms to exile, by all Greece Be also exiled? Not by Athens sure; For ne'er will Athens from its blest domains Expel the race of Hercules, appalled By Argos' menaced wrath. For neither Trachis. Nor is that city of Achaia here, Whence thou by boasting of the might of Argos In words like those which thou hast uttered now, These suppliants didst unjustly drive away Though seated at the altars. If thy threats Here too prevail, no longer shall we find Freedom, not e'en in Athens; but I know Full well the generous temper of its sons, And rather would they die. For to the brave Shame is a load which renders life most hateful. Enough of Athens—for immoderate praise Become invidious; I remember too How oft I have been heretofore distressed By overstrained encomiums. But on you How greatly 'tis incumbent to protect

These children will I show, since o'er this land You rule; for Pittheus was the son of Pelops From Pittheus Æthra sprung, from Æthra Theseus Your father; from your ancestors to those Of your unhappy suppliants I proceed; Alcides was the son of thundering Jove And of Alcmena; from Lysidice, Daughter of Pelops, did Alcmena spring, One common grandsire gave your grandame birth, And theirs; so near in blood are you to them; But, O Demophoon, what beyond the ties Of family you to these children owe Will I inform you, and relate how erst With Theseus in one bark I sailed, and bore Their father's shield, when we that belt, the cause Of dreadful slaughter, sought; and from the caves Of Pluto, Hercules led back your sire. This truth all Greece attests. They in return From you implore this boon, that to their foes They may not be surrendered up, nor torn By force from these your tutelary gods, And banished from this realm. For to yourself 'Twere infamous and baneful to your city Should suppliants, exiles, sprung from ancestors The same with yours (ah, miserable me! Behold, behold them!) with a forceful arm Be dragged away. But to your hands, and beard, Lifting these hallowed branches, I entreat you Slight not Alcides' children, undertake Their cause; and, oh, to them become a kinsman. Become a friend, a father, brother, lord, For better were it to admit these claims, Than suffer them to fall beneath the rage Of Argive tyrants.

Chorus.

I with pity heard

Their woes, O king, but now I clearly see
How noble birth to adverse fortune yields;
For though they spring from an illustrious sire,
Yet meet they with afflictions they deserve not.

Demophoon. Three powerful motives urge me, while I view The misery which attends you, not to spurn These strangers; first dread Jove, before whose altars

You with these children sit; next kindred ties, As services performed in ancient days, Give them a claim to such relief from me As from their godlike father mine obtained: And last of all that infamy which most I ought to loathe; for if I should permit A foreigner this altar to despoil, I in a land of freedom shall no longer Appear to dwell, but to surrender up, Through fear, the suppliants to their Argive lords, In this extreme of danger. Would to heaven You had arrived with happier auspices; But tremble not lest any brutal hand Should from this hallowed altar force away You and the children. Therefore go thou back To Argos, and this message to Eurystheus Deliver; tell him too if there be aught Which 'gainst our guests he can allege, the laws Are open; but thou shall not drag them hence.

Copreus. Not if I prove that it is just, and bring

Prevailing reasons?

Demophoon

How can it be just To drive away the suppliant?

Copreus. Hence no shame Shall light on me, but ruin on your head.

Demophoon. Should I permit thee to convey them hence In me 'twere base indeed.

Let them be banished Copreus.

From your domains, and I elsewhere will seize them. Demophoon. Thou fool, who deem'st thyself more wise than

Jove!

Copreus. All villains may, it seems, take refuge here. Demophoon. This altar of the gods, to all affords

A sure asylum.

In a different light, Copreus.

This to Mycene's rulers will appear. Demophoon. Am I not then the monarch of this realm?

Copreus. Offer no wrong to them, if you are wise. Demophoon. Do ye then suffer wrong when I refuse

To violate the temples of the gods?

Copreus. I would not have you enter on a war Against the Argives.

Equally inclined Demophoon. Am I to peace, yet will not I yield up These suppliants.

Hence am I resolved to drag Copreus. Those who belong to me.

Thou then to Argos Demophoon.

Shalt not with ease return. Soon will I make Copreus.

Th' experiment and know.

If thou presume Demophoon. To touch them, thou immediately shalt rue it.

Copreus. I by the gods conjure you not to strike

A herald.

Demophoon. Strike I will, unless that herald Learn to behave discreetly.

Go. And you, Chorus. O king, forbear to touch him.

I retire: Copreus.

For weak in combat is a single arm. But I again shall hither come, and bring A host of Argives armed with brazen spears: Unnumbered warriors wait for my return. The king himself, Eurystheus, is their chief; He on the borders of Alcathous' realm Waits for an answer. He in glittering mail, Soon as he hears your arrogant reply, To you, your subjects, this devoted realm, And all its wasted forests will appear, For we in vain at Argos should possess A band so numerous of heroic youths, If we chastised not your assuming pride.

Exit COPREUS.

Demophoon. Away, detested miscreant; for I fear not Thy Argos: and thou ne'er, by dragging hence These suppliants, shalt disgrace me: for this city As an appendage to the Argive realm I hold not, but its freedom will maintain.

Chorus. 'Tis time each sage precaution to exert, Ere to the confines of this land advance The troops of Argos: for Mycene's wrath Is terrible in combat, and more fierce Than heretofore will they invade us now.

For to exaggerate facts beyond the truth Is every herald's custom. To his king, How many specious tales do you suppose Of the atrocious insults he endured, He will relate, and add how he the loss Of life endangered?

Iolaus.

To the sons devolve No honours which exceed the being born Of an illustrious and heroic sire. And wedding into virtuous families. But on that man no praise will I bestow, Who by his lusts impelled, among the wicked A nuptial union forms; hence to his sons Disgrace, instead of pleasure, he bequeaths. For noble birth repels adversity Better than abject parentage. When sinking Under the utmost pressure of our woes, We find these friends and kinsmen, who alone Amid the populous extent of Greece Stand forth in our behalf. Ye generous youths, Now give them your right hands, and in return Take those of your protectors: O my sons, Draw near: we have made trial of our friends. If ye again behold your native walls, Possess the self-same mansions, and the honours Which your illustrious father erst enjoyed; These deem your saviours and your friends, nor wield Against their fostering land the hostile spear. On your remembrance let these benefits Be ever stamped, and hold this city dear; For they deserve your reverence, who from us Repel so great a nation, such a swarm Of fierce Pelasgian troops: and, though they see Our poverty and exile, have refused To yield us up, or banish from their realm. Both while I live, and after the cold grave Receives me at the destined hour, my friend, I with loud voice your merits will applaud, Approaching mighty Theseus, and my words Shall soothe your father's ear when I recount With what humanity you have received us, And how protected the defenceless sons

Of Hercules: by your illustrious birth Distinguished, you the glories of your sire Through Greece maintain: sprung from a noble lineage, Yet are you one among that chosen few Who in no instance deviate from the virtues Of your great ancestry: although 'mid thousands Scarce is a single instance to be found Of those who emulate their father's worth.

Chorus. This country, in a just and honest cause, Is ever prompt to succour the distressed. Hence in its friends' behalf hath it sustained Unnumbered toils, and now another conflict I see impending.

Rightly hast thou spoken, Demophoon. And in such toils I feel a conscious pride. These benefits shall never be forgotten; But an assembly of the citizens I instantly will summon, and arrange A numerous squadron, to receive the onset Of fierce Mycene's host, first sending spies To meet them, lest they unawares assail us. For the bold warrior, who without delay Goes forth to battle, keeps the foe aloof. I also will collect the seers, and slay The victims; but do you, old man, meanwhile Enter the palace with these children, leaving Jove's altar: for my menial train are there, Who will with fond solicitude attend you, Although I am not present: but go in.

Iolaus. I will not leave the altar; on this seat We suppliants will remain, and pray to Jove, That prosperous fortunes may attend your city. But when you from this conflict are with glory Released, we to your palace will repair; Nor are the gods, who war on our behalf, O king, inferior to the gods of Argos. For o'er that city, Jove's majestic consort, Juno, but here Minerva doth preside. This I maintain, that nought ensures success Beyond the aid of mightier deities,

Nor will imperial Pallas be subdued.

Exit DEMOPHOON.

CHORUS.

ODE.

T

Boast as thou wilt, and urge thy proud demand,
This nation disregards thy ire,
Thou stranger from the Argive land.
Nor can thy sounding words control
The steadfast purpose of my soul:
Great Athens, by her lovely choir
Distinguished, shall unstained preserve
Her ancient glory, nor from virtue swerve
But thou, devoid of wisdom, dost obey
The son of Sthenelus, the tyrant's impious sway.

II.

Who com'st amidst an independent state,
In nought inferior to the strength
Of Argos, and with brutal hate
Dar'st, though a foreigner, to seize
The exiles, who our deities
Implore, and in these realms at length
From their distress obtain a shield:
Thou e'en to sceptred monarchs will not yield,
Yet no just plea thy subtle tongue hath found

Yet no just plea thy subtle tongue hath found.

How can such conduct warp the man whose judgment's sound?

III.

Peace is the object of my dear delight:
But thou, O tyrant, thou whose breast
Well may I deem by frenzy is possest,
If 'gainst this city thou exert thy might,
Pant'st after trophies which thou ne'er shalt gain.
Bearing targe and brazen lance
Others with equal arms advance.

O thou, who fondly seek'st th' embattled plain, Shake not these turrets, spare the haunt Of every gentle grace.—Thou wretch, avaunt.

DEMOPHOON, IOLAUS, CHORUS.

Tolaus. Why com'st thou hither, O my son, with eyes Expressive of affliction? from the foe

What recent information canst thou give? Do they delay their march, are they at hand, Or bring'st thou any tidings? for the threats That herald uttered sure will be accomplished. Blest in the favour of the gods, the tyrant Exults, I know, and arrogantly deems That he o'er Athens shall prevail; but Jove Chastises the presumptuous.

With numerous squadrons, and its king Eurystheus,

Demophoon. Argos comes

Myself beheld him. It behoves the man Who claims the merit of an able chief, Not to depend upon his spies alone To mark the foe's approach. But with his host He hath not yet invaded these domains, But halting on you mountain's topmost ridge Observes (I from conjecture speak) the road By which he may lead forth his troops to battle, And where he in this realm with greatest safety May station them. Already have I made Each preparation to repel their onset. The city is in arms, the victims stand Before the altars, with their blood t' appease The wrath of every god, and due lustrations Are sprinkled by the seers, that o'er our foes We may obtain a triumph, and preserve This country. Every prophet who expounds The oracles, convening, have I searched Into each sage response of ancient times, Or public or concealed, on which depends The welfare of the realm. In all beside Differ Heaven's mandates: but one dread behest Runs through the several auspices, to Ceres They bid me sacrifice some blooming maid Who from a nobler sire derives her birth. Zeal have I shown abundant in your cause, But will not slay my daughter, nor constrain Any Athenian citizen to make Such an abhorred oblation: for the man Exists not, who is so devoid of reason. As willingly to yield his children up With his own hands. But what afflicts me most

Is this: tumultuous crowds appear; some cry, "Tis just that we the foreign suppliants aid, But others blame my folly. If no means Can be devised to satisfy them all, Soon will a storm of civil war arise. See thou to this, and think of some expedient, How ye and how this country may be saved, Without the citizens' calumnious tongues My fame assailing. For I rule not here With boundless power, like a barbarian king; Let but my deeds be just, and in return Shall I experience justice.

Chorus. Will not Jove

Suffer this city to exert its courage,
And aid these hapless strangers as we wish?

Iolaus. Our situation, O my sons, resembles That of the mariners, who having 'scaped The storm's relentless fury, when in sight Of land, are from the coast by adverse winds Driven back into the deep. Thus from this realm Just as we reach the shore, like shipwrecked men, Are we expelled. O inauspicious Hope, Why didst thou soothe me with ideal joy, Although it was ordained that thou should'st leave Thy favours incomplete? The king deserves At least to be excused, if he consent not To slay his subjects' daughters, to this city My praise is due, and if the gods would place me In the same prosperous fortunes, from my soul Your benefits should never be effaced. But now, alas! no counsel can I give To you, my children. Whither shall we turn? What god have we neglected? To what land Have we not fled for shelter? We must perish, We shall be yielded up. My being doomed To die, I heed but for this cause alone, That by my death I shall afford delight To our perfidious foes. But, O my sons, For you I weep, I pity you, I pity Alcmena, aged mother of your sire, Oh, most unhappy in a life too long! I too am wretched, who unnumbered toils

Have fruitlessly endured; it was ordained, It was ordained, alas! that we should fall Into the hands of our relentless foes, And meet a shameful, miserable death. Know you, what still remains for you to do, On my behalf? For all my hopes of saving The children are not vanished. In their stead Me to the Argive host surrender up, O king, and rush not into needless danger, Yet save these children. To retain a love Of life becomes me not; I yield it up Without regret. It is Eurystheus' wish The rather to seize me, and to expose To infamy, because I was the comrade Of Hercules; for frenzy hath possessed His soul. The wise man, e'en in those he hates, Had rather find discretion than a want Of understanding; for a foe endued With sense will pay due reverence to the vanguished.

Chorus. Forbear, old man, thus hastily to blame
This city; for to us though it might prove
More advantageous, yet to our disgrace

More advantageous, yet to our disgrace Would it redound, should we betray our guests.

Demophoon. A generous, but impracticable, scheme
Is that thou hast proposed: for Argos' king
In quest of thee no squadrons hither leads.
What profit to Eurystheus from the death
Of one so old as thou art could arise?
He wants to murder these: for to their foes
The rising blossoms of a noble race,
To whom the memory of their father's wrongs
Is present, must be dreadful: for all this
He cannot but foresee. But if thou know
Of any other counsel more expedient,
Adopt it; for my soul hath been perplexed,
Since that oracular response I heard
Which fills me with unwelcome apprehensions.

[Exit Demophoon.

MACARIA, IOLAUS, CHORUS.

Macaria. Deem not that I, O strangers, am too bold Because I from my chamber venture forth;

This is my first request: for silence, joined With modesty and a domestic life, Is woman's best accomplishment. I heard Your groans, O Iolaus, and advanced Though not appointed by our house to act As their ambassadress; in some degree Yet am I qualified for such an office, I have so great an interest in the weal Of these my brothers; on my own account I also wish to hear if any ill, Added to those you have already suffered, Torture your soul.

Iolaus.

Not now for the first time. On thee, O daughter, most of all the children Of Hercules my praise can I bestow: But our ill-fated house, just as it seemed Emerging from its past disgraces, sinks Afresh into inextricable ruin. The king informs us, that the seers, whose voice Expounds the will of heaven, have signified No bull nor heifer, but some blooming maid Who from a noble sire derives her birth, Must be the victim, if we would redeem The city and ourselves from utter ruin; Here then are we perplexed: for his own children He says he will not sacrifice, nor those Of any of his subjects. Though to me Indeed he speaks not plainly, in some sort He intimates, that if we by no means Can extricate ourselves from these distresses, We must find out some other land to flee to. For he this realm would from destruction save.

Macaria. May we indulge the hope of our escape Upon these terms?

Iolaus. These only: in all else With prosperous fortunes crowned.

Macaria. No longer dread

The spear of Argos, for myself, old man, Am ready, ere they doom me to be slain, And here stand forth a voluntary victim. For what could we allege on our behalf, If Athens condescend to undergo

Dangers so great, while we who have imposed These toils on others, though within our reach Lie all the means of being saved, yet shrink From death? Not thus: we should provoke the laugh Of universal scorn, if, with loud groans, We suppliants, at the altars of the gods, Should take our seats, and prove devoid of courage, From that illustrious father though we spring. How can the virtuous reconcile such conduct? This to our glory would forsooth redound (O may it never happen!) when this city Is taken, should we fall into the hands Of our triumphant foes, when after all Some noble maid reluctant must be dragged To Pluto's loathed embrace. But from these realms Cast forth, should I become an abject vagrant, Must I not blush when any one inquires, "Why came ye hither with your suppliant branches Too fond of life? Retreat from these domains. For we no aid to cowards will afford." But if when these are dead, my single life Be saved, I cannot entertain a hope That I shall e'er be happy: through this motive Have caused full many to betray their friends. For who with a deserted maid will join, Or in the bonds of wedlock, or desire That I to him a race of sons should bear? I therefore hold it better far to die. Than to endure, without deserving them, Such foul indignities, as can seem light To her alone, who, from a noble race Like mine, descends not: to the scene of death Conduct, with garlands crown me, and prepare, If ye think fit, th' initiatory rites; Ye hence the foe shall conquer: for this soul Shrinks not with mean reluctance. I engage For these my brothers, and myself, to bleed A willing victim; for with ease detached From life, I have imbibed this best of lessons, To die with firmness in a glorious cause.

Chorus. Alas! what language shall I find, t' express
My admiration of the lofty speech

I from this virgin hear, who for her brothers Resolves to die? What tongue can utter words More truly generous; or what man surpass Such deeds as these?

Iolaus. Thou art no spurious child,

But from the godlike seed of Hercules,
O daughter, dost indeed derive thy birth.
Although thy words are such as cannot shame,
Thy fate afflicts me. Yet will I propose
What may with greater justice be performed.
Together call the sisters of this maid,
And to atone for the whole race, let her
On whom th' impartial lot shall fall, be slain;
But without such decision 'tis not just
That thou should'st die.

Macaria. I will not die as chance

The lot dispenses; for I hence should forfeit All merit: name not such a scheme, old man. If me ye will accept, and of my zeal Avail yourselves, I gladly yield up life Upon these terms, but stoop not to constraint.

Iolaus. The speech thou now hast uttered soars beyond

What thou at first didst say, though that was

noble:

But thou thy former courage dost surpass By this fresh instance of exalted courage, The merit of thy former words, by words More meritorious. Daughter, I command not, Nor yet oppose thy death: for thou by dying Wilt serve thy brothers.

Macaria. You in cautious terms

Command me: fear not, lest on my account You should contract pollution: for to die Is my free choice. But follow me, old man, For in your arms would I expire: attend, And o'er my body cast the decent veil: To dreadful slaughter dauntless I go forth, Because I from that father spring, whose name With pride I utter.

Iolaus. At the hour of death

I cannot stand beside thee.

Macaria. Grant but this,

That when I breathe my last, I may be tended By women, not by men.

It shall be thus,

O miserable virgin: for in me
'Twere base, if I neglected any rite
That decency enjoins, for many reasons;
Because thy soul is great, because 'tis just,
And of all women I have ever seen,
Because thou art most wretched. But from these
And from thy aged kinsman, if thou wish
For aught, to me thy last behests address.

Macaria. Adieu, my venerable friend, adieu!

Instruct these boys in every branch of wisdom, And make them like yourself, they can attain No higher pitch; strive to protect them still. And for their sake that valued life prolong; Your children we, to you our nurture owe. Me you behold, mature for bridal joys, Dying to save them. But may ye, my band Of brothers who are here, be blest, and gain All those advantages, which to procure For you, the falchion shall transpierce my breast Revere this good old man, revere Alcmena Your father's aged mother, and these strangers. Should ye be ever rescued from your woes, Should gracious Heaven permit you to revisit Your native land, forget not to inter, With such magnificence as I deserve, Your benefactress, for I have not proved Deficient in attention to your welfare, But die to save our family. To me These monumental honours shall suffice Instead of children, or the virgin state, If there be aught amid the realms beneath, But 'tis my wish there may not: for if grief On us frail mortals also there attend. I know not whither any one can turn: For by the wise hath death been ever deemed The most effectual cure for every ill.

Iolaus. O thou, distinguished by thy lofty soul, Be well assured thy glory shall outshine That of all other women; both in life And death, shalt thou be honoured by thy friends. But ah, farewell! for with ill-omened words I tremble lest we should provoke the goddess, Dread Proserpine, to whom thou now art sacred, [Exit Macaria.]

My sons, I perish: grief unnerves my frame; Support and place me in the hallowed seat: And, O my dearest children, o'er my face Extend this garment: for I am not pleased With what is done: yet, had not Heaven's response Found this completion, we must all have died; For we must then have suffered greater ills Than these, which are already most severe.

CHORUS.

ODE.

In just proportion, as the gods ordain, Is bliss diffused through life's short span, Or sorrow portioned out to man: No favoured house can still maintain From age to age its prosperous state, For swift are the vicissitudes of fate, Who now assails pride's towering crest, Now makes the drooping exile blest. From destiny we cannot fly; No wisdom can her shafts repel; But he who vainly dares her power defy Compassed with endless toils shall dwell. Ask not from Heaven with impious prayer, Blessings it cannot grant to man, Nor waste in misery life's short span O'erwhelmed by querulous despair. The nymph goes forth to meet a noble death. Her brothers and this land to save, And fame, with tributary breath

For dauntless virtue finds a way
Through labours which her progress would delay.
Such deeds as these, her father grace
And add fresh splendour to her race,

Shall sound her praises in the grave.

But if with reverential awe thou shed

Over the virtuous dead

A tear of pity, in that tear I'll join,

Inspired with sentiments like thine.

SERVANT, IOLAUS, CHORUS.

Servant. Ye children, hail! but where is Iolaus,

That aged man; and hath your grandame left

Her seat before the altar?

Iolaus. Here am I

If aught my presence can avail.

Servant. On earth
Why art thou stretched, what means that downcast

Iolaus. Domestic cares have harrowed up my soul.

Servant. Lift up thy head, arise.

I am grown old,

And all my strength is vanished.

Servant. But to thee

I bring most joyful tidings.

Iolaus. Where have I seen thee? I remember not.

Servant. Hyllus' attendant, canst thou not distinguish These features?

Iolaus. O my friend, art thou arrived To snatch me from despair?

Servant. Most certainly:

Moreover the intelligence I bring

Will make thee happy.

Iolaus. Thee I call, come forth,

Alcmena, mother or a noble son, And listen to these acceptable tidings: Full long thy soul, for those who now approach, Was torn with grief, lest they should ne'er return.

ALCMENA, SERVANT, IOLAUS, CHORUS.

Alemena. Whence with your voice resounds this echoing dome,

O Iolaus, is another herald From Argos come, who forcibly assails you? My strength indeed is small, yet be assured Of this, presumptuous stranger, while I live Thou shalt not bear them hence. May I no more Be deemed the mother of that godlike son, When I submit to this. But if thou dare To touch the children, with two aged foes Ignobly wilt thou strive.

Iolaus. Be of good cheer,
Thou hoary matron, banish these alarms;
No herald with a hostile message comes
From Argos.

Alcmena. Why then raised you that loud voice,

The harbinger of fear?

Iolaus. That from the temple
Thou might'st come forth, and join us.

Alcmena. What you mean I comprehend not. Who is this?

He tells us

Thy grandson marches hither.

Alimena. Hail, O thou

Who bear'st these welcome tidings? but what brings

him
To these domains? Where is he? What affairs

To these domains? Where is he? What affairs Prevented him from coming hither with thee,
To fill my soul with transport?

He now marshals

Servant. H
The forces which attend him.

Alcmena. In this conference

Am I no longer then allowed to join?

Iolaus. Thou art: but 'tis my business to inquire

Into these matters.

Which of his transactions

Servant. Which of his transa Say art thou most solicitous to know?

Iolaus. The number of the troops he leads?
Servant.

Is great,

I cannot count them.

Tolaus.

The Athenian chiefs

Are sure apprised of this.

Servant. They are apprised,

And the left wing is formed.

Then the whole host

Arrayed in arms is ready for the battle.

Servant. The victims to a distance from the ranks Already are removed.

But at what distance Iolaus.

Is the encampment of the Argive warriors? Servant. So near that we their leader can distinguish. Iolaus. What is he doing; marshalling our foes? Servant. This we conjecture: for I could not hear

His voice: but I must go; for I my lord Will not abandon when he nobly braves

The dangers of the field.

Iolaus. I too with thee

Will join him; for the same are our intentions, As honour bids us, to assist our friends.

Servant. Unwisely hast thou spoken.

With my friends Tolaus.

Shall not I then the stubborn conflict share? Servant. That strength which erst was thine is now no more Iolaus. Can I not pierce their shields?

Thou may'st: but first Servant. More likely, fall thyself.

Iolaus. No foe will dare

To meet me face to face.

By thy mere looks, Servant. With that debilitated arm, no wound

Canst thou inflict. My presence in the field

Iolaus. Will to our troops give courage, and augment Their number.

Of small service to thy friends Will thy appearance prove.

Detain me not: Iolaus.

I for some glorious action am prepared. Servant. Thou hast the will to act, but not the power.

Iolaus. I will not be reproached for loitering here,

Say what thou wilt beside.

But without arms Servant.

How wilt thou face you warriors sheathed in mail? Iolaus. The various implements of war are lodged Beneath these roofs; with freedom will I use, And if I live, return them; if I die, The god will not demand them back again. Go then into the temple, and reach down Those martial trappings from the golden nails On which they hang, and bring them to me swiftly. For this were infamous, while some are fighting,
If others loiter slothfully behind. [Exit Servant.

Chorus. Time hath not yet debased that lofty soul
'Tis vigorous, though thy body be decayed.
Why should'st thou enter on these fruitless toils,
Which only injure thee, and to our city
Can be of little service? on thy age
Should'st thou reflect, and lay aside attempts

That are impossible, for by no arts

The long-lost force of youth canst thou regain.

Alemena. What schemes are these? distempered in your mind.

Me and my children mean you to abandon? *Iolaus*. The battle is man's province: to thy care

Them I consign.

Alimena. But if you die, what means Have I of being saved?

Iolaus. The tender care Of the surviving children of thy son.

Alcmena. Should they too meet with some severe mishap,
Which may the gods forbid.

Iolaus. These generous strangers
Will not betray thee; banish every fear.

Alemena. In them I trust: I have no other friend.

Iolaus. Jove too, I know, is mindful of thy toils.

Alemena. I will not speak in disrespectful terms

Of Jove: but whether he his plighted troth

Have kept, full well he knows.

Servant. [returning.] Thou here behold'st

The brazen panoply, now haste to sheathe
Thy limbs in mail; the battle is at hand,
And Mars detests a loiterer: if thou fear
Accourrements so ponderous, to the field
Advance disarmed, nor till thou join the ranks
Wear these unwieldy trappings; for meantime
I in my hands their burden will sustain.

Iolaus. Well hast thou spoken; with those arms attend me Ready for the encounter, place a spear In my right hand and under my left arm Hold me, and guide my steps.

Servant Shall I conduct

Servant.

A warrior like a child?

I must tread sure,

Else 'twere an evil omen.

Servant. Would thy power

Equalled thy zeal.

Iolaus. Haste: greatly twill afflict me If, left behind, I cannot join the fray.

Servant. Slow are thy steps, and hence thou deem'st I move

Iolaus. Behold'st thou not the swiftness of my pace? Servant. Thou to thyself I see appear'st to hasten,
Although thou gain'st no ground.

Iolaus. When in the field

Thou seest me, thou wilt own I speak the truth. Servant. What great exploit achieving? I could wish

That thou might'st prove victorious.

Iolaus. Through his shield

Some foe transfixing.

Servant. We at length may reach Th' embattled plain, but this I greatly fear.

Iolaus. Ah, would to heaven, that thou, my withered arm,
Again wert vigorous, as in former days
Thee, I remember, when thou didst lay waste
The Spartan realms with Hercules; thus fight
My battles now, and singly will I triumph
Over Eurystheus, for that dastard fears
To face the dangers of th' embattled field:
Too apt in our ideas to unite
Valour with wealth, yet to the prosperous man
Superior wisdom falsely we ascribe.

. [Exeunt IOLAUS and SERVANT.

CHORUS.

ODE.

I. I.

O fostering Earth, resplendent Moon, Who gladd'st the dreary shades of night, And thou, enthroned at broadest noon, Hyperion, 'midst exhaustless light, To me propitious tidings bring, Raise to the skies a festive sound, And waft the gladsome notes around,

Till, from the palace of our king, They echo through Minerva's fane: My house, my country, to maintain Against the ruthless spoiler's pride, Menaced because this realm extends Protection to its suppliant friends. I with the sword our contest will decide.

Although there seem just cause for dread, When cities like Mycene blest, Whose triumphs fame hath widely spread Enter this region to invest Our bulwarks, harbouring ruthless hate. Think, O my country, think what shame, Should we reject the suppliant's claim Appalled by Argos' haughty state. Resistless Jove shall aid the spear I brandish unappalled by fear; The tribute of eternal praise From all that breathe, to him is due: Nor magnified by our weak view

Shall men above the gods their trophies raise.

II. I.

Descend with venerable mien. O thou our guardian and our queen, For on thy fostering soil we stand, These walls were reared by thy command, Drive from our menaced gates the lawless host, Suppress that Argive tyrant's boast; For if by you unaided, is this hand

Too weak their fury to withstand.

II. 2.

Thee, O Minerva, we adore, Thy altar ever streams with gore: We on each moon's concluding day To thee our public homage pay; Through every fane harmonious numbers sound, Sweet minstrelsy then breathes around,

And th' echoing hills their nightly dance repeat As the nymphs move with agile feet.

SERVANT, ALCMENA, CHORUS.

Servant. O royal dame, the message that to you I bring, is both concise, and what reflects

On me abundant glory to relate,

In fight have we prevailed, and trophies reared On which the armour of your foes is hung.

Alcmena. This day hath brought thee hither, O my friend
Thy freedom for such tidings to receive:
But one anxiety there still remains

To which thou leav st me subject; much I fear For the important lives of those I love.

Servant. They live, and have obtained from all the host
The greatest fame.

Alcmena. And Iolaus too,

My aged friend?

Servant. Yet more, he hath performed
Through the peculiar favour of the gods
Exploits most memorable.

Alcmena. What glorious deed

Hath he achieved in fight?

Servant. From an old man,

He is grown young again.

Alcmena. Thou speak'st of things
Most wonderful. But first, how fought our friends
With such success, I wish thee to inform me.
Servant. All that hath passed, at once will I relate.

When to each other in the field opposed,
We had arranged both armies, and spread forth
The van of battle to its full extent,
Hyllus alighting from his chariot, stood
In the midway 'twixt either host, and cried:
"Thou leader of the Argive troops, who com'st
With hostile fury to invade this land,
Thy interests recommend what I propose,
Nor can Mycene suffer from the loss
If thou deprive her of a single warrior;
Therefore with me encounter hand to hand,
And if thou slay me, seize and bear away
The sons of Hercules; but if thou die,
My palace and hereditary rank
Permit me to enjoy." The troops assented,

And praised what he had spoken as the means Of finishing their labours, and a proof Of his exalted courage. But Eurystheus Unmoved by reverence for th' assembled host Who heard the challenge, and with terror smitten Forgot the general's part, nor dared to face The lifted spear, but acted like a dastard: Yet he who was thus destitute of courage Came to enslave the sons of Hercules. Hyllus again retreated to his rank; The prophets too, when they perceived no peace Could be effected by a single combat, Without delay the blooming virgin slew, Auspicious victim, from whose pallid lips Her trembling spirit fled. The lofty car Some mounted, o'er their sides while others flung Their bucklers to protect them. To his host, Meantime the king of Athens, in a strain Worthy of his exalted courage, spoke: "Ye citizens, the land to which ye owe Your nourishment and birth, now claims your aid." Equally loth to sully the renown Of Argos and Mycene, in like terms The foe besought his partners of the war Their utmost vigour to exert. No sooner Had the loud signal by Etutria's trump Been given, than they in thickest battle joined. Think with what crash their brazen shields resounded. What groans and intermingled shouts were heard! First through our lines the host of Argos burst, And in their turn gave way: then foot to foot, And man to man opposed, in stubborn conflict We all persisted: multitudes were slain; But in this language either chief his troops Encouraged: "O ye citizens of Athens, O ve who till the fruitful Argive field, Will ye not from your native land repel The foul disgrace?" But with our utmost efforts Scarce could we put to flight the Argive host. When Iolaus saw young Hyllus break The ranks of battle, he with lifted hands Entreated him to place him in his car,

Then seized the reins, and onward in pursuit Of the swift coursers of Eurystheus drove. As to the sequel; from report alone Let others speak, I tell what I have seen: While through Pallene's streets he passed, where rise Minerva's altars, soon as he descried The chariot of Eurystheus, he a prayer Addressed to blooming Hebe, and to Jove, That for that single day he might recover The pristine vigour of his youth, and punish His foes as they deserve. You now shall hear What a miraculous event ensued: Two stars 'bove Iolau's chariot stood, And overshadowed it with gloomy clouds, Which, by the wise 'tis said, were Hercules Your son, and blooming Hebe: from that mist Which veiled the skies, the chief grown young again, Displayed his vigorous arms, and near the rocks Of Scyron, seized Eurystheus in his car. Binding his hands with chains, he hither brings The Argive tyrant, a distinguished prize, Who once was happy; but on all mankind Loudly inculcates by his present fortunes This lesson: not too rashly to ascribe Felicity to him who in appearance Is prosperous, but to wait till we behold His close of life; for fortune day by day Doth waver.

Chorus.

Thou great author of success. O Jove, at length am I allowed to view The day, by which my terrors are dispelled. Alcmena. 'Twas late indeed, when thou, O Jove, didst look On my afflictions; yet am I to thee Most grateful for the kindness thou hast shown me. And though I erst believed not that my son Dwells with the gods, I clearly know it now. Now, O my children, ye from all your toils Shall be set free, and of Eurystheus, doomed With shame to perish, burst the galling yoke, Behold your father's city, the rich fields Of your inheritance again possess, And sacrifice to your paternal gods.

From whom excluded, in a foreign land Ye led a wandering miserable life. But with what sage design yet undisclosed, Hath Iolaus spared Eurystheus life, Inform me: for to us it seems unwise Not to avenge our wrongs when we have caught Our enemies.

Servant.

He through respect to you Hath acted thus, that you might see the tyrant Vanquished, and rendered subject to your power, Not by his own consent, but in the yoke Bound by necessity; for he was loth To come into your presence, ere he bleed, And suffer as he merits. But farewell, O venerable matron, and remember The promise you first made when I began These tidings, and, oh, set me free: for nought But truth should from ingenuous lips proceed.

[Exit Servant.

CHORUS.

ODE.

I. I.

To me the choral song is sweet,

When the shrill flute and genial banquet meet,

If Venus also grace the festive board:

I taste a more refined delight

Now I behold my friends (transporting sight!)

To unexpected happiness restored.

For in this nether world, eventful Fate,

And Saturn's offspring Time, full many change

1 2

create.

Follow the plain and beaten way,
From Justice, O my country, never stray,
Nor cease the powers immortal to revere.
To heights scarce short of frenzy rise
The errors of that mortal, who denies
Assent to truths confirmed by proofs so clear.
Jove's power by signal judgments is descried,
Oft as his vengeance blasts the towering crest of pride.

II. I.

In heavenly mansions with the blest, Thy son, O venerable dame, doth rest; He hath confuted those invidious tales,

That to loathed Pluto's house he came
Soon as he perished in that dreadful flame:
He under roofs of burnished gold regales,
On the soft couch of lovely Hebe placed;
Them two, both sprung from Jove, O Hymen, thou
hast graced.

II. 2.

Events, which strike man's wondering eyes,
From a variety of causes rise.
For fame relates how Pallas saved the sire,
And from her city far renowned,
Her race, protection have the children found;
She hath suppressed th' o'erweening tyrant's ire,
Whose violence no laws could ere control;
Curse on such boundless pride, that fever of the soul.

Messenger, Eurystheus, Alcmena, Chorus.

Messenger. Your eyes indeed behold, O royal dame, Yet shall this tongue declare that we have brought Eurystheus hither, unexpected sight, Reverse of fortune his presumptuous soul Foresaw not, this oppressor little deemed That he should ever fall into your hands, When from Mycene, by the Cyclops' toil Erected, he those squadrons led, and hoped With pride o'erweening to lay Athens waste: But Heaven our situation hath reversed: And therefore with exulting Hyllus joins The valiant Iolaus, in erecting Trophies to Tove the author of our conquest. But they to you commanded me to lead This captive, wishing to delight your soul: For 'tis most grateful to behold a foe Fall'n from the height of gay prosperity.

Alemena. Com'st thou, detested wretch? at length hath Justice

O'ertaken thee? First hither turn thy head,

And dare to face thine enemies: for, dwindled Into a vassal, thou no longer rul'st. Art thou the man (for I would know the truth) Who didst presume to heap unnumbered wrongs, Thou author of all mischief, on my son While yet he lived, wherever now resides His dauntless spirit? For in what one instance Did'st thou not injure him? At thy command, Alive he travelled to th' infernal shades: Thou sent'st, and didst commission him to slav Hydras and lions. Various other mischiefs. Which were by thee contrived, I mention not, For an attempt to speak of them at large Would be full tedious. Nor was it enough For thee to venture on these wrongs alone, But thou, moreover, from each Grecian state Me and these children hast expelled, though seated As suppliants at the altars of the gods, Confounding those whose locks are grey through age With tender infants. But thou here hast found Those who were men indeed, and a free city Which feared thee not. Thou wretchedly shalt perish.

And pay this bitter usury to atone

For all thy crimes, whose number is so great That it were just thou more than once shouldst die.

The rulers of this land

Messenger. You must not kill him.

Alcmena. Then have we in vain

Taken him captive. But what law forbids His being slain?

Messenger.

Consent not.

Alcmena. Is it not by them esteemed

A glorious action to despatch our foes?

Messenger. Not such as they have seized alive in battle.

Alcmena. Is Hyllus satisfied with this decree?

Messenger. He, in my judgment, will forsooth act rightly,

If he oppose what Athens shall enjoin.

Alcmena. The captive tyrant ill deserves to live,

Or longer view the sun.

Messenger. In this first instance They did amiss, when by their swords he died not.

Alcmena. Is it not just that he should suffer still? Messenger. He who will slay him is not to be found. Alcmena. What shall I say if some adventurous hand-Messenger. If you do this, you will incur great censure. Alcmena. I love this city, I confess: but no man,

Since he is fall'n into my power, shall force This prisoner from me: let them call me bold And more presumptuous than becomes a woman,

I am resolved to execute my purpose.

Messenger. Full well I know the hatred which you bear To this unhappy man is terrible, And such as merits pardon.

Be convinced Eurystheus. Of this, O woman, that I cannot flatter, Nor to preserve this wretched life say aught, Whence they may brand me with a dastard's name. For I with much reluctance undertook This contest; near in blood am I to thee, And of that race whence sprung thy son Alcides. But whether I consented, or was loth, Me Juno caused by her immortal power To harbour this dire frenzy in my breast. Since I became his foe, since I resolved Upon this strife, much mischief I devised, And brooded o'er it many a tedious night, That after I had wearied out and slain Those I abhorred, I might no longer lead A life of fear: for well I knew thy son Was no mere cipher, but a man indeed: Though strong my hate, on him will I confer The praise he merits from his valiant deeds. But after he was dead, was I not forced, Because I was a foe to these his sons, And knew what bitter enmity 'gainst me They from their sire inherited, to leave No stone unturned, to slay, to banish them, And plot their ruin? Could I have succeeded In these designs, my throne had stood secure. If thou my prosperous station hadst obtained, Wouldst thou not have attempted to hunt down The lion's whelps, instead of suffering them At Argos unmolested to reside?

Thou canst prevail on no man to give credit
To such assertions: therefore, since my foes
Forbore to slay me, when prepared to lose
My life in battle, by the laws of Greece,
If I now die my blood will fix a stain
Of lasting guilt on him who murders me.
This city hath discreetly spared my life,
More influenced by its reverence for the gods
Than by the hatred which to me it bears.
My answer to the charges thou hast urged
Against me, having heard, esteem me now
A suppliant, and though wretched, still a king,
For such is my condition: though to die
I wish not, yet can I without regret
Surrender up my life.

Chorus.

To you, Alcmena,
A little wholesome counsel would I give,
This captive monarch to release, since such
The pleasure of the city.

Aicmena. If he die,
And to the mandates of th' Athenian realm
I still submit, what mischief can ensue?

Chorus, 'Twere best of all. But how can these two things

Be reconciled?

Alemena. I will inform you how
This may with ease be done. I, to his friends,
When slain will yield him up, and with this land
Comply in the disposal of his corse:
But he shall die to sate my just revenge.

Eurystheus. Destroy me if thou wilt; to thee I sue not:
But on this city, since it spared my life
Through pious reverence, and forbore to slay me,
Will I bestow an ancient oracle
Of Phæbus, which in future times shall prove
More advantageous than ye now suppose;
For after death, so have the Fates decreed.
My corse shall ye inter before the temple
Of the Pallenian maid: to you a friend
And guardian of your city, shall I rest
Beneath this soil for ever; but a foe
To those who spring from this detested race
When with their armies they invade this land

Requiting with ingratitude your kindness:
Such strangers ye protect. But thus forewarned,
Why came I hither? Through a fond belief
That Juno was with far superior power
To each oracular response endued,
And that my cause she ne'er would have betrayed.
On me waste no libations, nor let gore
Be poured forth on the spot of my interment,
For I to punish these their impious deeds,
Will cause them with dishonour to return:
From me shall ye receive a double gain,
For you I will assist, and prove to them
Most baneful e'en in death.

Alcmena.

To slay this man, if what ye hear be true,
That welfare to this city hence will spring,
And your prosperity? For he points out
The safest road. Alive he is a foe,
But after he is dead will prove a friend.
Ye servants bear him hence, and to the dogs
Cast forth without delay his breathless corse!
Think not, presumptuous wretch, that thou shalt live

Again t' expel me from my native land.

Chorus. With this am I well pleased. My followers, go.

For hence in our king's sight shall we stand guiltless.

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